

Crossing the River: Xiangxi Miao Spirit Mediumship

By

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Abstract

In Xiangxi Miao communities, there are three kinds of spiritual practitioners: the *zimei* medium, the *badui* spirit official, and the *daoshi* Daoist monk. The *zimei* consult spirits on the daily affairs of the Miaos in the Miao language, the *badui* spirit officials perform rituals memorializing legendary Miao ancestors in local Chinese, and the *daoshi* Daoist monks conduct funerals, also in local Chinese.

This thesis describes how *zimei* establish themselves as mediums and perform rituals, which occur in a syncretic matrix of Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The Xiangxi Miao practice animist, Daoist, Buddhist, Confucian, and syncretic forms. The *zimei*'s ritual, known as the *bu-zimei*, serves to restore social harmony when it has been disrupted. Through the author's observations and interviews during the summers of 2009 and 2010, the *bu-zimei* performed by the *zimei* is both animist and profoundly syncretic. The *zimei* establish and perform mediumship: this includes their recruitment, rituals offered, paraphernalia, clients, patron spirits, and performance. Apart from its normative nature, the *bu-zimei* is also a social activity. In the Xiangxi Miao context, social harmony is summarized as people having health, obtaining good harvests, giving thanks and observing filial piety, and having thriving domestic animals. The above social norms summarize what constitutes the three kinds of social harmony that the Xiangxi Miao are seeking to achieve: that among humans, between humans and spirits, and between humans and nature. The *zimei* are often invited to perform the *bu-zimei*, restoring social harmony by imposing social norms.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Origin and Modern Realizations of Xiangxi Miao Sorcerers

Modern Xiangxi Miao people often say that in ancient times, humans and spirits could meet and communicate with each other. At that time, the passage between *yangjian* 阳间 ‘the living world’ and *yingjian* 阴间 ‘the nether world’ was much easier. “Now that the two worlds have become divided, only the sorcerers may, with impunity, venture into the otherworld and return safely to the living world” (Tapp 1989: 59).

The *Song of Creation*, which is sung during funerals, tells how Xiangxi Miao *wushi* 巫师 ‘sorcerers’ originated, and highlights several themes of this thesis:

One day, *Taishang Laojun* 太上老君 ‘the Universal Lord of the Way and its Virtue’¹ descended into the living world, disguising himself as an old beggar in dirty clothes in order to test the filial piety of his three apprentices. The apprentices were wearing a long gown, a red gown, and plain Miao clothes, respectively. When the “beggar” got to a river, the apprentices approached him. He asked them to carry him across the river. The apprentice in the long black gown refused, because he was afraid to be sullied by the beggar. The apprentice in the red gown agreed to carry him, but paused to take off his

¹ The *Taishang Laojun* 太上老君 is the third of the most venerable gods of Daoist religion, the so-called Three Pristine Ones. The others are called “the Universal Lord of the Primordial Beginning” (*Yuanshi Tianzun* 元始天尊), and “the Universal Lord of the Numinous Treasure” (*Lingbao Tianzun* 灵宝天尊) (Yin 2005: 49). That the Daoist deity *Taishang Laojun* 太上老君 appears in the Miao legend indicates how deeply integrated Chinese Daoism is into Miao spiritual practice.

shoes. Only the apprentice in plain Miao clothes agreed immediately, and carried the “beggar” across the river without any hesitation. After crossing the river, the Universal Lord reverted to his celestial identity, and based on his apprentices’ reactions, taught each the apprentices a different kind of *wushu* 巫术 ‘sorcery’ in order to interact with the otherworld. The Lord explained to his three apprentices the implications of their actions: The first black-robed apprentice who had refused to sully his clothes would from now on have to stand throughout the performance of rituals, and moreover must speak and read scripture solely in Chinese. If he made mistakes, his eyes would be destroyed by spirits. The second red-robed apprentice, who had agreed to carry the Lord but had hesitated, wouldn’t need to read scripture books, but was still required henceforth to perform rituals standing and in Chinese. He was allowed to make some mistakes in his performance. But only the third man, who had unhesitatingly carried the Universal Lord across the river, would be allowed to perform rituals in the Miao language. Furthermore, he would be permitted to sit during the performance, and his actions and language were allowed flexibility.

— As told by Mr. Wu Songmou in Shanjiang 山江 village, July 20, 2009.

All three apprentices represent major spiritual-magical figures in Miao society. The first man in the legend became the primordial Miao *daoshi* 道士 ‘funeral conductor, Daoist monk’ specializing in Miao funeral rites conducted in the local Chinese language. His black gown symbolizes the elite ranks of the dominant Daoist religion

introduced by the Chinese. The second man became the primordial *badui* ‘spirit official, Ch. 苗老司’² specializing in legendary ancestor worship rituals, which are also conducted in Chinese. His red gown symbolizes his dominant rank in the spirit world itself. The third and final man became the primordial *zimei* ‘spirit medium, Ch. 仙娘’ who serves as a spirit medium and conducts rituals in the Miao language.

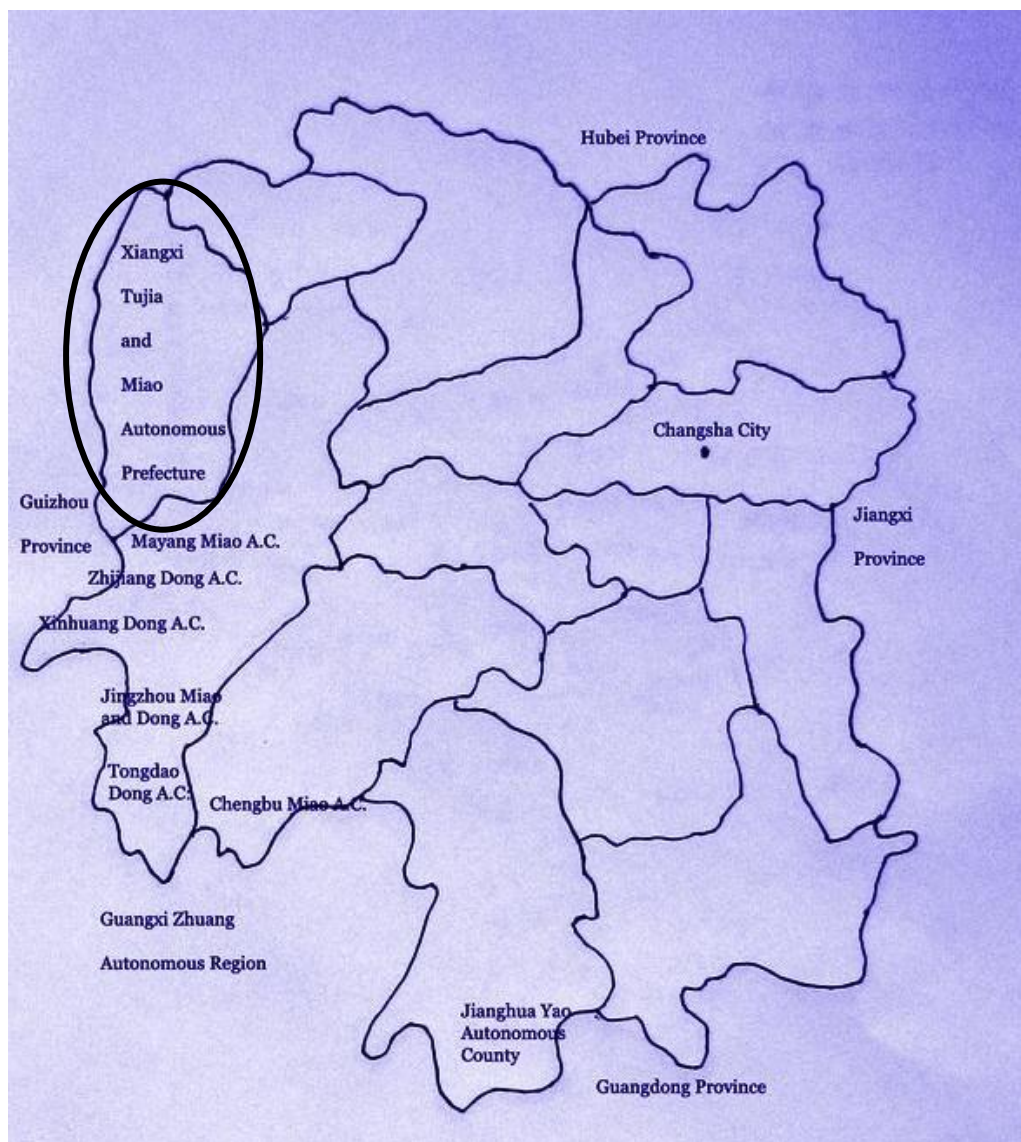
This thesis analyzes the performance of the latter sorcerer, the *zimei*, in present-day Xiangxi Miao communities. I hypothesize that the *zimei*’s spiritual practices serve to restore social harmony when it has been disrupted. I choose to focus on the *zimei* spirit mediums because their performances are more prevalent than those of the other two spiritual practitioners. Nonetheless, Chapter 2 describes the complementary societal roles that these spiritual practitioners fulfill.

1.2 Miao Ethnicity and the Xiangxi Miao

Xiangxi 湘西 is located in western Hunan 湖南 Province in the central part of the People’s Republic of China. It is a mountainous area located in the Wuling 武陵 range of the eastern Yunnan-Guizhou 云贵 Plateau. Administratively, Xiangxi is on the border of Hunan with Hubei 湖北 and Guizhou 贵州 Provinces (see Figure 1 below), as well as the Chongqing 重庆 Municipality. Xiangxi is formally an ethnic minority of the “Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture” and is home to 30 official ethnic groups (*minzu* 民族 ‘Nationalities’). The predominant two groups are the Tibeto-Burman Tujia 土家 and the Hmong-Mien Miao 苗.

² Any Chinese terms and toponyms used in this thesis are written in Latin-script transliteration followed by their Chinese characters. *Badui* is a Miao language term.

Figure 1: Hunan Province (Xiangxi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture is circled)



Source: <http://www.ethnic-china.com/Geo/Hunan/Hunan%20Map.jpg>

The Miaos of Xiangxi Prefecture speak Western Xiangxi Miao language [ISO 639-3: mmr], which belongs to the Hmongic branch of the Hmong-Mien language family (Lewis 2009). Hmong-Mien languages are spoken throughout much of Southeast Asia, including Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar. In China, Hmongic (Miao) languages are spoken in Hubei, Hunan, Sichuan, Guangxi, Yunnan, and Guangdong Provinces (see Figure 2 below). In China, the Hmong-Mien languages are referred to as the *Miao-Yao* 苗瑶 languages.

Figure 2. Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) ethnolinguistic area (Xiangxi is circled).



Source: <http://www.starferrymusings.com/?p=655>

In China, all Hmongic speakers are considered to belong to one macrogroup termed Miao, and, as such, the Miao constitute one of China's largest nationalities (7.39 million people according to the 2000 census, cited in Wu 2007: 1). The Miao population of the Xiangxi Prefecture numbered 886,100 in 2000 (Tong 2007: 13).

The use of the term “nationality” (*minzu* 民族) to refer to the Miao is a constructed category that essentializes ethnicity. Beginning in the 1950s, the Chinese government used the umbrella term “nationality” to include dozens of subgroups.

“Based on Miao linguistic distinctions, three main divisions of the Miao were designated. The Xiangxi Miao or Eastern dialect, which was relatively unified, was spoken in Hunan and northeastern Guizhou by those who had formerly been classed as the Red Miao” (Schein 2000: 84-85).

In this thesis, I maintain the Chinese scholarly tradition of referring to both subgroups as Miao (e.g. the Xiangxi Miao) and the macrogroup (the official Miao Nationality), as well as those languages. Hmong refers only to Hmongic groups outside China.

I recognize that the choice puts my terminology at odds both with Western scholarship (which uses Hmongic for the macrogroup and languages in and out of China, but Miao for the ethnic group within China) and with Hmong expatriates in the West. “The Hmong in the West in recent decades have consistently rejected the Miao term itself as derogatory” (Schein 2000: 96). Nonetheless, my use of the term Miao for the ethnic and macrogroups is legitimized by its widespread acceptance by the Miao peoples in China. The term also has had a long history and is widely known (Long 1985: 6).

1.3 Xiangxi Miao Social Organization

Xiangxi Miao social organization can reveal the social roles and status of sorcerers. Social organization determines how people interact, the kinship terms and behaviors they use, and how they divide up various tasks that need to be accomplished. The traditional bedrock of Miao society is the *cunzhai* 村寨 ‘village.’

The village is the most important form of Xiangxi Miao social organization, for it is not only a natural grouping, but also an economic community. Some villages have dozens of households; others have hundreds. The affiliations within a village are not organized by blood lineage, but rather by clan surnames. People living in a village are treated as brothers and sisters. Some affairs in a village are usually governed by the *zhailao* 寨老 ‘village elder.’ Therefore, “each village, no matter how many households and surnames, should recommend a prestigious male elder to hold the post of village elder to govern public affairs. Nevertheless, the village elder is neither a lifelong position nor is it hereditary” (Huang 2008: 100).

A Miao belief in spirits gives those who communicate with them – the *wushi* sorcerers – particular social status, as they are able to travel into the otherworld. Since a community’s safety is dependent on the faithful performance of ritual activities on performing ritual activities, sorcerers and spirit mediums have been promoted to an influential and prestigious position in the village. Moreover, villagers are obligated to carry out the orders issued by *wushi* sorcerers. Thus, “the sorcerers become the creators of customary law, which influences the whole village’s will and action” (Huang 2008: 103).

Administratively, a dual political structure has been established at and above the level of the village.

The now dual structure of party and government organs that is based at the county (*xian*) level and extends in a widening bureaucratic pyramid to the regional (*diqu*), provincial (*sheng*) and national (*zhongyang*) levels has been established in the Miao village (*cunzhai*) through the villager committee and the posts of village secretary and accountant which are served for members of the party....In these respects the village of an agrarian ethnic minority does

not function any differently from other Han peasant villages (Tapp 2001: 94-95).

In addition, the Miao have a local community social structure “in which the elders and the sorcerers govern public affairs” (Huang 2008: 99). Compared with the locally appointed village government committee, the governance of elders and sorcerers has been weakened in the last forty years, yet it has its own internal stability. In the areas where the Xiangxi Miao live, each mountain has its own Miao village.

In the early twentieth century, the *zhailao* village elder and the *wushi* sorcerers played important roles in governing public affairs. However, with Chinese political reforms in the 1950s and 1960s, the social role of the village elder in present-day Xiangxi Miao communities has been weakened. Today, he mainly assists the local government-appointed *cunzhang* 村长 ‘village head’ to deal with village affairs. The Xiangxi Miao believe in spirits that reside in and animate some things, and want to contact spirits. The *wushi* sorcerers are persons capable of venturing into the otherworld, communicating with spirits by performing spiritual rituals. And this capability gives them high prestige and social status in a village.

1.4 Xiangxi Miao Spiritual Practices

Xiangxi Miao spiritual practices involve at least three different belief systems: animism, Daoism, and Buddhism. As this thesis will demonstrate, animism informs a great deal of the spirit mediumship undertaken by *zimei*. Given the steady Chinese migration to Miao areas – as well as Miao migrations within China – Miao also came into contact with three major Chinese religions: Daoism, Confucianism, and

Buddhism. While some elements of these belief systems blended together syncretically, other aspects were kept quite separate. *Zimei* mediums consult spirits on the daily affairs of villagers; Daoists perform important rituals memorializing legendary Miao ancestors; and Buddhists conduct funerals, sending the souls of the deceased to live with their ancestors. As the opening legend illustrated, these rituals are conducted in the Miao language (by the *zimei* mediums), and also in the local variety of Xiang 湘 Chinese language (by the *daoshi* Daoists monks and the *badui* Buddhist spirit officials). This use of language may well correlate with ethnolinguistic identity, a topic to which I return in my conclusions.

First and foremost, the Miao are animists, and thus believe that natural and supernatural forces reside in and animate all things (Conquergood 1989: 6; Huang 2004: 49; and Scott 1987: 34). Mountains have mountain spirits; trees have tree spirits; rocks have rock spirits; and flowers have flower spirits. The Xiangxi Miao do not distinguish animism from spirit mediumship because both believe that supernatural forces reside in some things. According to my interviews and observations during 2009-2010, animism is the dominant belief system among Xiangxi Miaos. However, Xiangxi Miao animism incorporates quite a number of Chinese Daoist and Buddhist gods and goddesses as well. Daoist figures include *Taishang Laojun* 太上老君 ‘the Universal Lord of the Way and its Virtue.’ Buddhist figures include *Guanyin* 观音 ‘Fertility Goddess.’

Yet many of the spirits worshipped by the Xiangxi Miao are part of a pantheist religious practice across the Chinese cultural sphere, known as Chinese folk religion

or as Shenism (from *shen* 神 ‘spirit’). Examples of these figures include: *Leigong* 雷公 ‘Thunder God’ and *zaoshen* 灶神 ‘Kitchen God.’ These illustrate how fundamentally syncretic Miao religious practices are.

Xiangxi Miao spiritual rituals that are both animist and syncretic are performed by the *zimei* mediums, who venture into the spiritual world to communicate with spirits in the Miao language.

Daoism plays an enormous role in Xiangxi Miao spiritual rituals. Daoism is one of China’s major indigenous religions. “The prime belief of Daoism is in learning and practicing ‘the way’ (*dao* 道), which is the ultimate truth to the universe” (Yin 2005: 15). Daoists use mediation and breathing to promote longevity. Daoists believe that influential Daoists and historical figures can be transformed into immortals, who then help and guide others. The Xiangxi Miao spiritual rituals primarily related to Daoism are performed by the *badui* spirit officials in local Chinese language. Performances of these rituals serve to worship Miao legendary ancestor *Chiyong* 蚩尤 and Miao Rescuer God *Nuoshen* 雩神.

The Daoism prevalent in Xiangxi Miao communities is likely due the historical persecution of Daoism, in addition to the encroachment of Chinese culture in formerly non-Chinese areas. The *badui* spirit official Wu Yunbang 吴云榜 explained to me that during the Mongol Yuan 元 Dynasty (1271-1368), Daoists attempted to gain favor with the Yuan court but lost debates against Buddhists. Many Daoists scripture books were burned. To preserve Daoism, the Daoists had to move to more remote areas, including the area that is today Xiangxi.

Buddhism is the third major belief system that plays a role in funerals in Xiangxi Miao society. Buddhism is the largest religion in China. Unlike Daoism, which views life as fundamentally happy, Buddhists view the normal condition of human life as suffering (*samsara*). However, Buddhism in central China has become fused with Confucian ancestor worship and the Chinese tripartite division of the cosmos into heaven, earth, and the underworld (see also Chapter 2 for more details on cosmology). Therefore, the Chinese syncretic Buddhist funeral is concerned with sending the souls of humans to heaven. Confusingly, Xiangxi Miao spiritual rituals related to Buddhism are performed by the *daoshi* 道士, (literally, ‘Daoist monk’), who performs funeral rites also in local Chinese language.

The *daoshi* Wu Yunhui 吴云辉 told me that even through severe religious persecution during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the *daoshi* Daoist monk’s practice continued to grow in Xiangxi Miao communities. The development of the *daoshi* reflects that Daoism is the dominant religion in China.

By focusing on the *zimei* medium’s practices, this thesis is primarily concerned with animism in Xiangxi Miao communities. Yet as we have seen above, many Xiangxi Miao spiritual practices are profoundly syncretic.

“Spirit medium” is the term that I believe best captures the practices of the *zimei* – who can be male or female – and the related *bu-zimei* ritual. I justify this term (and contrast it with *shaman*) in Chapter 2. The Miao word for the practitioner *zimei* means a divining person; the ritual *bu-zimei* means to consult a diving person (the verb *bu*

means ‘consult’). So the *bu-zimei* is literally ‘consulting spirit medium.’³

In this thesis, I aim to build upon recent research on Miao spirit mediums in a more southern part of China (Guizhou Province, Ma 2006), providing a fuller description and analysis of the *zimei*’s mediumship in Xiangxi Miao communities, and explore how the *zimei* spirit medium’s ritual, known as the *bu-zimei*, serves to restore social harmony when it has been disrupted.

1.5 Thesis Outline

Chapter 2 evaluates the existing literature on the Xiangxi Miao people and their history, Miao belief systems, cosmology, funerals, and the relations among spirit mediums, shamans, and the *zimei* spirit medium.

Chapter 3 describes my methodologies of participant observation, interviews, and the comparative method. Chapter 4 describes the *zimei* mediumship through their recruitment, rituals, paraphernalia, clients, patron spirits, and performance. In Chapter 5, I discuss the argument that performances of the *bu-zimei* ritual mirror and restore social harmony when it has been disrupted. Chapter 6 presents my conclusions.

³ In Chinese, the performance is referred to as Leaping Immortals 跳仙.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: The Miao and Their Belief Systems

2.1 Introduction

In recent years, some scholars have focused on Miao belief systems (Shi 1992; Sutton 2000; Wu 2001; Yang 2006; Zhang 2004; Zhen 2008); cosmology (Her 2005); funeral rituals (Falk 2004; Tapp 2001); shamanism (Huang 2004; Lemoine 1986; Tapp 1989); and Miao subgroups (Graham 1937; Tapp 2002). Other scholars have specialized in Miao migrations (Long 1985; Wu 1990; Wang 2009); costumes (Huang 1990); languages (Wang 1983); and marriages (Shi 1986; Yao 2001). “Scholars in the 1990s were mostly focused on Miao shamanism, migrations, languages, and costumes; and scholars in the early 21st century did detailed studies on Miao belief systems, cosmology, and funeral rituals” (Lu 2003: 96). This chapter describes Miao belief systems, cosmology, and funerals rites.

2.2 The Xiangxi 湘西 Miao People and Their History

We know from both Miao oral history and Chinese written history that Miaos originated somewhere in central China and migrated south and southwest to their historical territories. Quasi-historical legends, which are considered historical in China, state that the ancestors of the present-day Miao:

...come from the *Jiu Li* 九黎 ‘Nine Li’ tribes of the [legendary Emperors Yandi 炎帝 and Huangdi 黄帝 of the] *Yan-Huang* 炎黄 period, and the *Sanmiao* 三苗 of the [legendary sage-kings Yao and Shun of the] *Yao-Shun* 尧

舜 period. About five thousand years ago, the Miao tribes lived in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River basin. After reportedly being defeated in a conflict with *Yan-Huang* 炎黄 tribes [about four thousand years ago], the Miao were forced to cross the Yellow River and moved south to the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, where [around three thousand years ago] they established a state, *Sanmiaoguo* 三苗国, at the basin of Dongting Lake 洞庭湖. However, the state collapsed later through numerous conflicts with Han Chinese groups led by kings *Yao*, *Shun*, and *Yu* 禹. Military and population expansion into fertile lowlands by the Han Chinese [about 31 B.C.] eventually forced the Miao to migrate southwards to the mountainous border area of Guizhou and Hunan Provinces, which has an average elevation of one thousand feet above sea level. The present-day Xiangxi Miao, who are living at the border area of Hunan and Guizhou Provinces, are considered to be the descendants of those Miao who migrated from the basin of Dongting Lake where the state *Sanmiaguo* was once established (Wu 1990: 103).

The reference to the Miao and their migrations is also found in the textual authority of Chinese classics such as the *Zhanguo Ce* 战国策 ‘Plots of Warring States’ and the *Shi Ji* 史记 ‘Records of the Grand Historian.’

The *Chiyou* 蚩尤 tribe, members of which were designated as ancestors of the Miao, lived in the Yellow River basin around 3000 B.C.E. *Chi You* was killed by Huangdi tribe during the war of Zhuolu 涿鹿 in Shandong 山东 Province. Members of the tribe moved south to the territory of Dongting Lake in the middle and lower Yangzi River basin, where they established a state, *Sanmiaoguo*. The state was defeated by the Huangdi tribe around 21st century B.C.E., and the members were scattered widely. Some of them moved west to the Xiang 湘 (Hunan Province) (*Shi Ji* 1972[1958]: 5-28).

Therefore, according to oral history and Chinese written history, the ancestors of the present-day Miao migrated due to interethnic conflict and settled in what is today western Hunan and northeastern Guizhou Provinces.

A slightly different view of Miao migrations is offered by the ethnically Miao scholars Long (1985) and Shi (1992). They argue that the Miao moved from central to western China (to present-day Gansu 甘肃 and Sichuan 四川) after being defeated in a

conflict with *Yan-Huang* 炎黄 tribes four thousand years ago. The ancestors of the present-day Xiangxi Miao would in their view have migrated from the west (what is today Sichuan province), not from the territory north of Dongting Lake. However, the northern origin hypothesis (as represented above by Wu [1990]) accords best with the Miao origin legend quoted in Chapter 1, the *Song of Creation*, genetic and archaeological evidence, and Chinese documentary. As Schein (2000: 37) indicated, in the complete absence of written Miao records, oral history as recorded in practices and oral arts, genetic and archaeological evidence, and Chinese documentary take on a particularly important significance. The *Song of Creation* tells that the state *Sanmiaoguo* was established at the basin of Dongting Lake, and the *Sanmiao* were forced to move west to central China (today's western Hunan Province) after the state collapsed. The mtDNA data might provide some clues for tracing this Miao march:

The southern lineages account for only about 50% of Miao mtDNAs; most of the lineages prevalent in NEA (North East Asian) are found in Miao-Hunan (MHN), which has the highest frequency of such haplogroups in the Hmong-Mien populations. A careful inspection of the distribution of the northern mtDNA lineages revealed more information. A6 is almost absent in other southern populations, but it is present in Miao-Hunan. C5 is the dominating haplogroup C type in the southern populations; however, almost all haplogroup C mtDNAs are non-C5 in the two Miao populations. G3 is a very rare in NEA, and it is completely absent in the south. Surprisingly, two Miao-Hunan mtDNAs carry this haplogroup. These observations suggest that the Miao (Hmong) people may have more contact with the NEA" (Wen et al. 2004: 16).

According to oral history, the Xiangxi Miao made regular obeisances to spirits during their long migrations and depended on their blessings. Lacking political support and protection from a succession of states, dynasties, and eventually a

nation-state, the Xiangxi Miao instead relied upon the blessings of spirits. The *zimei* mediums become indispensable to Xiangxi Miao communities because of their capability to communicate with these spirits in the otherworld.

2.3 Miao Belief Systems

Miao belief systems are profoundly syncretic, including animism, Chinese Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. “Miao belief systems can be classified into four kinds: natural, ancestral, ghost and god worship, and totemism” (Luo 2000: 39). My interviews and observations during the summers of 2009 and 2010 lead me to agree with Luo’s (2000) classification, on which I will elaborate below.

2.3.1 Nature Worship

Natural phenomena are especially significant to the Miaos. The Miao are pantheists and believe that natural and supernatural forces reside in and animate all things (Tapp 1989: 59). For example, the Miaos believe that natural things such as large rocks and trees have personalities and consciousness. At the time of the Spring Festival of the lunar New Year, the villagers go to mountain tops and burn paper “money” (*joss paper* 烧纸钱) and incense 香, making their obeisances to gain supernatural protection. In return for these offerings, spirits are expected to reveal their supernatural will and knowledge.

In the Xiangxi Miao village of Xiacha 下茶, for example, villagers believe that the mountain at the west end of the village is animated by supernatural forces and that

it is the physical manifestation of the village spirit. All households in the village are expected to go to the mountain at the time of the Spring Festival of the lunar New Year in order to burn paper “money” and incense to acquire health, wealth, protection, blessings, and good luck from the mountain. More importantly, during a ritual, a *zimei* medium should visit this village spirit. Some local Han Chinese in these villages have similar New Year practices.

2.3.2 Ancestral Worship

The Miao also worship deceased ancestors, including parents and grandparents. The Miao believe that deceased ancestors have invisible souls that can live around mortals or in the otherworld, and that their actions can influence humans’ daily lives. Therefore, “a series of ancestral worship rituals are performed by the *wushi* sorcerers capable of contact with spirits in order that humans can gain the supernatural protection and blessings from the ancestors” (Wu 2001: 71).

Miao ancestral worship is mainly manifest in ceremonies memorializing ancestors. “There are three kinds of Miao Nationality ancestral worship rituals: rituals in remembrance of ancestors, funeral rites, and rituals exorcising evil spirits” (Wu 2001: 71). These three kinds of rituals are still common.

As the *zimei* Long Fengqi 龙凤齐 explained it, rituals in remembrance of ancestors are a prime form of ancestral worship in the Miao communities, focusing on the deceased ancestors and legendary ancestors. Nevertheless, different rituals are performed by different specialists who are able to approach the spirits. For example,

there are spirit officials called *badui* (Ch. *Laosi* 老司). The *badui* spirit officials are different from the *zimei* spirit mediums because the former specialize in legend-based ancestral worship in the local Chinese language while the latter serve as mediums and conduct rituals in the Miao language. The spirit officials perform a water buffalo sacrifice, *nongnie* (Ch. 椎牛, lit., ‘eating the cow’), which honors the Miao legendary ancestor *Chiyu* 蚩尤. They also perform a ritual called *qunong*, which honors the memory of the traditional Miao culture hero *Nuoshen* 雉神 (Wu 2001: 73). Rituals performed by the *zimei* mediums are called *bu-zimei*. The term *zimei* is also Miao, meaning a divining person; *bu* is also Miao, meaning consult. These rituals are known in Chinese scholarship as leaping immortals activities (跳仙活动) (Ma 2006: 50). Although each performance is different, each generally aims to express gratitude and pray for ancestral blessings, preserve or restore health, help the population flourish, and benefit from a good harvest.

Funeral rites play a vital role in both Miao and local Han Chinese communities. Through funeral rites, the deceased meet their ancestors, and may become deities taught by these ancestors who can in turn bless their descendants in the living world. However, those who die in accidents cannot meet and live with their ancestors, unless they are given special funerals. A woman who died during childbirth, for example, should be given a long death ritual so she can live with her ancestors. During the special ritual, the *daoshi* Daoist monks perform a seven-day-ritual to find her lost soul.

The Miao believe ancestors should be models of Confucian morality for their

descendants in the living world. Specifically, ancestors should model gratitude and filial piety for the living. Descendants may, however, criticize those deceased ancestors who make trouble. Those troublemaking dead relatives are referred to as ancestral evil spirits; naturally, they do not receive the same treatment as good ancestral spirits. Evil spirits cause misfortunes such as difficult childbirth, unidentified illnesses, and unforeseen events.

As usual, there are two kinds of evil spirits in the communities of the Miao Nationality: one is the evil spirits of the ancestral clan; the other is spirits of other clan. Whether the evil spirits are from one's own or the other clan, they can cause sufferings and misfortunes, and should be exorcised through performing rituals (Wu 2001: 72).

However, rituals of exorcism are usually performed by the *zimei* medium after a period of several years of misfortune, when crops have failed, domestic animals or other members of the household have been ill, and the fortunes of the household in general are believed to be adversely affected.

The Miao worship ancestors, and they often burn *joss* paper to ensure that the deceased have good things in the afterlife. Miao ancestral worship is closely related to Chinese Confucianism. Confucianism pays attention to filial piety 孝 'respect for parents and ancestors' and ancestor worship 敬祖 – an extension of filial piety. Ancestors are worshipped or venerated as if they were still living. Miao ancestral worship relates the current spiritual practices of local Chinese. At the time of the Spring Festival of the lunar New Year, for example, both Miao and local Chinese go to the mountain, burning *joss* paper to memorialize their ancestors.

2.3.3 Worship of Ghost and Gods

Pantheism in Chinese folk religious practice is a syncretism of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist practices. According to Chinese folk religion, the cosmos is divided into three realms: heaven, the world of the living, and the underworld. The gods and goddesses such as Daoist *Taishang Laojun* 太上老君 ‘the Universal Lord of the Way and its Virtue,’ Buddhist *Guanyin* 观音 ‘Fertility Goddess,’ and Chinese folk pantheist *Tudigong* 土地公 ‘Kitchen God’ live in heaven; humans live in the world of the living; and the deceased live in the underworld. Pantheism in Chinese folk religion and animism both assert that supernatural forces reside in some things. For example, both Chinese and Miaos worship *Tudigong* Kitchen God. In the long course of the immersion in Chinese society, the Miao have assimilated some cultural elements of the Han Chinese folk religious practice. Thus, Miao animism is related to Han Chinese pantheism. According to Chinese folk religion, ghosts and gods are spirits. Ghosts are not respected by humans, while gods are. However, both must receive attention.

Xiangxi Miaos are convinced that a person’s birth, old age, illness, death, as well as the weather, is all the result of activities instigated by ghosts and gods. They are therefore not to be ignored. In the local Miao language, ghosts or spirits are known as *gun*, and gods are known as *pou*. A ghost is always the spirit of a deceased person or animal (i.e. the “ghost of the pig”) and a god is a legend-based spirit (i.e. the “Thunder God”). However, “the Xiangxi Miao Nationality often does not distinguish *gun* ‘ghost’ from *pou* ‘god.’ *Pou* god may be called *gun* ‘ghost, spirit.’ *Gun* ghost and

pou god are the same supernatural spirits” (Zheng 2008: 37). For example, while Thunder God is one of the most important gods, he is sometimes called a god and sometimes a ghost. When I was a child, my parents often said to me that *Gunsuo* ‘Ghost of the Thunder’ would come to punish me with his axe if I was not thankful for my food. In addition, the important *nongban* ‘pig offering’ ritual commemorates the Miao by offering a pig to the ancestral spirits. Some people instead call it *nong bagun*, ‘eating ghost of the pig.’ All of these words (*gunsuo*, *nongban*, and *nongban gun*) are from the local Miao language.

There are at least 70 other gods and ghosts in the Xiangxi Miao pantheon, who protect those humans who make the proper obeisances. The few examples above show how the world is regulated and threatened by good and evil gods and ghosts, respectively. These practices are similar to local Chinese practices because they are imbued with Confucianism, showing respect for parents and ancestors. Moreover, the trouble that these evil spirits cause affects social harmony; the *zimei* mediums perform rituals to restore social harmony when it has been disrupted.

2.3.4 Totemism

Totemism also plays an important role in Miao communities. Totemism can be elaborated as a “contingent explanation” based on “arbitrary signs” that are functional (Levi-Strauss 1963). The different Miao groups across China have different objects of worship. For example, “the Miao Nationality in southeastern Guizhou province worships maple trees, so there are many maple trees in villages” (Luo 2000: 39).

Other Miao groups in Sichuan province worship butterflies as powerful fertility symbols and consider the butterfly to be their totem (ibid.).

The Miao worship the legendary *Panfu* 盘瓠 as an ancestor. “A legend states that *Panfu* was a dog-god. Its clan was one of important members of the union of [the aforementioned] *Chiyou* and *Sanmiao* tribes. Therefore, the Miao who migrated to western Hunan, northeast Guizhou, southern Sichuan, and western Hubei still keep relics worshipping *Panfu*. These Miaos consider both *Chiyou* and *Panfu* to be their ancestors” (Shi 1992: 51). Even today, evidence of *Panfu* worship abounds, including the *Panfu* cave in Jishou 吉首 city, a *Panfu* rock, a *Panfu* brook, and a *Panfu* pond in Luxi 泸溪 County. “In Mayang 麻阳 Miao Autonomous County, there are many *Panfu* temples where the local Miao come to make money and food offerings, and to burn paper money and incense, making their obeisances for exchange of blessings and protection” (Lei 2002: 61).

2.3.5 Limitations of Luo’s Taxonomy of Miao Belief Systems

Luo’s (2000) taxonomy of Miao belief systems has some limitations because he does not include Chinese Daoism and Buddhism, nor does it acknowledge that local Chinese and Miaos share many spiritual practices. Miao belief systems incorporate many gods of Chinese Daoism and Buddhism because of their long immersion in Chinese society.

However, there are also Miao religious practices that are distinct from those of the Han Chinese. The Miao are animists, worshipping spirits. Miao and Han spiritual

rituals to communicate with the deceased are different. The Miao can contact the deceased anytime through rituals performed by the *zimei* mediums. The Han Chinese often contact their deceased relatives at a particular time. For example, the fifteenth day of the seventh month in each lunar year is a time for communication with the deceased in Han Chinese practice.

2.4 Miao Cosmology

The Miao traditional cosmos is divided into three interconnected realms: earth, spirit world, and sky or upper realm. Respectively, the three major realms represent life, death, and renewal. The cosmos is not a dead space: it is alive, inhabited and endowed with creative movement and activity (Her 2005: 5-6).

This Miao cosmology is very similar to Chinese cosmology. Chinese folk religion divides the cosmos into three interconnected realms: heaven, the world of the living, and the underworld. Here, heaven is equal to upper realm; the world of the living is equal to earth; and the underground is equal to spirit world. Indeed, in most of the eastern and southeast Asian area, this three-part view of the universe is common. “The cosmology of the Miao in Southeast Asia is made up of three worlds which are: the above, the middle, and the bottom. The world of the above is situated in the sky where the supernatural beings reside, and this world is the reflection of the human world with the same types of places and people; the world of the middle is located in the earth where human beings and good and bad spirits live together; the world of the bottom exists as an underground realm of dwarfs or a sea kingdom of the dragons” (Yang 2006: 2).

My interviews during 2009-2010 confirmed these views. Humans live in the realm of *duidu* ‘earth’; the deceased and spirits live in the realm of *dabia* ‘spirit world’; and gods and goddesses, such as *Mingma* ‘Fertility Goddess’ (in charge of a child’s descent to the earth), lives in the realm of *niuwang* ‘heavenly upper realm.’

Since Miaos are scattered throughout central and south China, and their Hmong relatives throughout Southeast Asia live in diverse ecological and interethnic environments, cosmological views vary. According to the Miao general worldview, however, the universe is complicated and sophisticated, and it is inevitably composed of three realms or worlds that are interconnected. Human beings, spirits, and the deceased ancestors reside in different realms, respectively. Celestial beings, ancestor spirits, and human beings constantly interact through spirit mediums, who are capable of traveling back and forth in a state of trance.

2.5 Miao Funerals

The most syncretic religious practices are funeral rites. Death rituals play a vital role in Miao communities. It is said that the souls of the deceased are unable to go to meet their ancestors without proper funerals. It is through funerals that conceptions of Miao cultural identity find their purest expressions (Tapp 2001: 169). After people die, their souls should be sent to live with their deceased ancestors. Funerals are rituals performed to guide the souls of the deceased to live with their ancestors in the spirit world.

Sources on Miao funerals are useful for furthering understanding of Miao

cosmology and the *zimei* mediums' ritual performances.

During the process of Miao funeral rites in western Hunan (Xiangxi) and Sichuan provinces, the two musical pieces *qhab ke* and *qeej*, which are sung and played in the Miao funeral rites, are typical examples of Miao identity. *Qhab ke*, the great song of opening the way for the soul of the deceased, guides the souls of the deceased back to the village of their ancestors from where they will be reborn as a member of the same clan. *Qhab Ke* is sung by a local master of the way who has been specially invited to the funeral. Cooked rice and eggs are repeatedly offered by the master to the mouth of the corpse. After the *qhab ke*, the corpse is ritually raised in its coffin and placed in a central position inside the central hall; all the women begin to wail as the insistent drum which accompanies the *qeej* continues to summon neighbors and friends to the unfolding funeral process. The *qhab ke* is usually recited toward the evening of the first day of the funeral (Tapp 2001: 169-189).

My own research concurs with Tapp's analysis. All three *wushi* sorcerers play a role in funerals. The *daoshi* Daoist monks sing *qhab ke*, opening the way to send souls of the deceased back to the village in which their ancestors live. The village where ancestors live is called *dabia* spirit world by the Xiangxi Miao. The *badui* spirit officials then "open" a way for the *zimei* mediums to travel. When the *zimei* medium is invited to send food to recently deceased individuals, he or she finds the way opened by the *badui* and sends the deceased back to the village where their ancestors now live. Should the *zimei* medium not find the way, the soul of the newly deceased will not be found.

There is a strong connection between Chinese Daoism and funeral rites in Miao culture. Those that conduct those rights are termed *daoshi* 道士, which is the normal Chinese-language term for a Daoist priest. In Xiangxi Miao funeral practice, *daoshi* simply refers to funeral ritual practitioners.

The purpose of the funeral rite is to send the deceased back to their original

village in the world of the above in the tripartite cosmology. In Xiangxi Miao communities, *zimei* spirit mediums are often invited to perform the *bu-zimei* ritual, going into *dabia* spirit world to contact the deceased for the sake of humans in the living world. However, it is in the funeral rituals that the souls of the deceased are sent to *dabia* spirit world to live with their ancestors. Thus, there is a relationship between funeral rituals and performances of the *bu-zimei* ritual. Funeral rituals make spiritual rituals of the *zimei* spirit mediums feasible. If the deceased are not sent back to live with their ancestors during funerals, it is impossible for the *zimei* mediums to find the souls of the deceased and send them the food that is offered.

2.6 Distinguishing the *Zimei* Spirit Mediums from Shamans

As arbiters between the spiritual and the living world, spirit mediums provide rituals in healing and divination. “The immortals may reveal their will and speak to worshippers through a medium who they have selected” (Elliot 1955: 46). In rituals, worshippers consult the mediums on problems related to their health, wealth, family conflicts, and on determining auspicious dates for ceremonies, charms, and jobs. According to Elliot (1955: 15), spirit mediumship occurs when a spiritual being of vast and undefined powers possesses the body of a human medium and enables him to inflict injury upon himself without feeling pain, and to speak with divine wisdom, giving advice to worshippers and curing their illnesses.

The *zimei* in Xiangxi Miao communities serve as mediums to communicate with spirits. “In Miao communities, people have a strong tendency to believe in the

immortals. This tendency becomes more obvious and urgent to persons involved with misfortunes in daily life” (Ma 2006: 64). However, the Miao are unable to communicate with spirits directly, except those who are called the *zimei* and the *badui* spirit officials.

A *zimei*, to some extent, undertakes the task of pointing out the right way to someone who goes astray and foresees men’s hardships and sufferings. “Those people who are more involved in hardships and misfortunes trust and rely upon the *zimei* and always follow the *zimei*’s advice” (Ma 2006: 63). The *zimei* Long Meiji 龙妹已 told me that the *zimei* are often invited by their worshippers to perform rituals, communicate with spirits in the otherworld and consult the *zimei* on problems related to their health, wealth, crops, childbirth, family conflicts, and the selection of auspicious dates for ceremonies.

Both the Miao *zimei* and typical spirit mediums are persons who are considered to be possessed by spirits during rituals. They are conceived as arbiters between spirits and humans, doing so by providing a body or vehicle through which the spirit can communicate with living people. In rituals worshippers consult the *zimei* and spirit mediums on problems in relation to health, wealth, fortunes, family conflicts, and the selection of auspicious date for ceremonies. Therefore, the *zimei* are spirit mediums.

I disagree with the claim made by Fadiman (1997), Schein (2000), and Tapp (1989) that Miao *zimei* spirit mediums are shamans. I base my claims on their social status in the nether world, and the tools they use in rituals. “Spirit mediums are persons who are possessed by spiritual beings, who enable them to speak with divine

wisdom, giving advice to worshippers and curing their illnesses” (Elliot 1955: 15). In contrast, a shaman differs from a possessed person. For example, the shaman controls his or her spirits, in the sense that he or she, a human being, is able to communicate with the dead, demons, and nature spirits, without thereby becoming their instrument (Eliade 1951 [1972]: 6). “A shaman always remains in control of his familiar spirits, but a spirit medium is strictly possessed by his patron spirits” (Tapp 1989: 71).

Due to their different relations to spirits, shamans have a superior status to spirit mediums. While shamans are in possession of their spirits, during a trance, the Xiangxi Miao *zimei* are spirit mediums possessed by spirits. The *zimei* do not claim to possess or claim to exercise control over the spirits with which they work. Rather, they represent themselves as working *at the will* of the spirits. Therefore, the *zimei* have an inferior status to shamans.

A second argument in favor of the term spirit medium for the *zimei* is the absence of any shamanistic accoutrements. Unlike the shamans, the *zimei* does not hold any tool during the performances; there is merely a ritual altar placed before a chair in which the *zimei* sit; and she or he wears plain clothing. In contrast, ritual objects such as the drum and costume, especially the shaman’s hat and objects that hang from the shaman’s clothing play a critical role in shamanic ceremonies (Eliade 1951 [1972]). The shamans use drums and costume to call spirit allies (Kehoe 2000: 8).

I have argued in this section that the *zimei* practitioners are spirit mediums, not shamans. There is, however, a second kind of spiritual practitioner in Xiangxi Miao society known as *badui* ‘spirit officials.’ Like *zimei*, they are able to contact spirits in

rituals. But unlike the *zimei* who can include women, the *badui* spirit officials must be male, and their title and authority is inherited through male filial lineage (father to son, or father-in-law to son-in-law). As spirit officials, they have a superior status compared to *zimei* practitioners. During rituals, the *badui* actually controls his familiar spirits and is not possessed by them. Moreover, the *badui* beat drums and wear red gowns during the performance. Therefore, I conclude that the *badui* spirit officials are shamans, in contrast to the *zimei* mediums. Spirits may reveal their will and speak to worshippers through the *zimei*, who have been selected for communicating with spirits for humans. During rituals, the *zimei* are possessed by spirits, and they function as mediators between *yangjian* ‘the living world’ and *yinjian* ‘the spiritual world.’

In sum, the *zimei*, the focus of my study, must be considered spirit mediums and not shamans; but shamans do exist in Miao society in the form of *badui* spirit officials.

2.7 On Miao Spirit Mediums: The *Zimei*

Very few ethnographers have conducted research on Miao *zimei* mediums. Long (2008) and Peng (2007) only make brief mention of the term *zimei* in their works. An exception is the Miao scholar Ma Yongbin 麻勇斌, who did extensive participant observation of *zimei* and their rituals in some Miao communities of Guizhou Province. He meticulously recorded five versions of the *bu-zimei* and conducted interviews with several *zimei* (Ma 2006: 65). Nevertheless, although he exhorts other researchers to do

so, Ma did not investigate the broader social value behind the *bu-zimei* (Ma 2006: 66).

In this thesis, I hope to fill that gap, particularly by evaluating my hypothesis that the social value behind the *bu-zimei* is the restoration of social harmony. Situating Xiangxi Miao spiritual practices within a historical and area context – including, importantly, the Chinese folk religious context – provides basis to analyze the *zimei*'s performance.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Methodologies anthropologists use to learn about a given people or cultures include participant observation, survey research, interviews, cross-cultural comparison, historical analysis, and more. I utilized three primary techniques: participant observation, interviews, and the comparative method. Participant observation and interviews collected data to help me understand the performance of the *zimei* mediumship, and the comparative method allowed me to contextualize this understanding.

3.2 Participant Observation

“Participant observation...means only the researcher lives among the people he or she is studying, takes part in their social life, and watches what is happening, asking questions when one does not understand” (Murphy 1989: 246-247). Participant observation allowed me to acquire a close and intimate familiarity with the *zimei* mediums and the *bu-zimei* rituals through an intensive involvement with them within Miao communities.

Between June and August 2009, I conducted participant observation in the Xiangxi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture of Hunan Province, in the villages of Shanjia 山江, Quangongping 千工坪, Machong 麻冲, Paibi 排碧, Muli 木里, Duli

都力, and Laershan 腊尔山. There are 30,000 people living in these seven villages, and 99 percent of the total population is Miao (2000 census, cited in Tong 2007: 13). During this summer fieldwork, I did extensive onsite participant observation during six *bu-zimei* performed by the *zimei* in different places. I obtained informed consent from all participants before conducting any fieldwork. Prior to conducting fieldwork, I obtained University of Kansas Human Subjects Committee approval in May 2009 for this work.

The genders, ages, names, marital status, and home villages of the *zimei* performing rituals I observed are summarized as the following Table 1. The identified *zimei*'s genders, ages, and marital status helped me analyze what kinds of people in Xiangxi Miao communities are likely to become the *zimei*.

Table 1. The genders, ages, names, marital status, and home villages of the *zimei*

Role	Gender	Age	Name	Marital Status	Home Village
<i>zimei</i> 1	female	40	Wu Mei	married	Shanjiang
<i>zimei</i> 2	female	46	Long Hepi	married	Muli
<i>zimei</i> 3	female	35	Long Ximei	married	Duli
<i>zimei</i> 4	male	45	Wu Xiangyin	unmarried	Machong
<i>zimei</i> 5	female	55	Wu Xiangqin	married	Laershan
<i>zimei</i> 6	female	67	Long Su	married	Paibi
<i>zimei</i> 7	female	47	Zhang Yin	married	Machong

These *bu-zimei* performances I witnessed are summarized as follows:

Table 2. *Bu-zimei* performances observed

Role	Location	Date	Topic
Performance 1	Quangongping	June 2, 2009	<i>sadai</i> ‘asking for sons, Ch. 求子’
Performance 2	Quangongping	June 10, 2009	<i>sadai</i> ‘asking for sons, Ch. 求子’
Performance 3	Shanjiang	July 6, 2009	<i>Songli</i> ‘sending food to deceased ancestors, Ch. 送饭’
Performance 4	Shanjiang	July 15, 2009	<i>songli</i> ‘sending food to deceased ancestors, Ch. 送饭’
Performance 5	Laershan	July 25, 2009	<i>zhuga</i> ‘healing illness, Ch. 治病’
Performance 6	Muli	August 6, 2009	<i>nanwei</i> ‘expressing gratitude, Ch. 谢恩’
Performance 7	Shanjiang	March 4, 2010 ⁴	<i>nanwei</i> ‘expressing gratitude, Ch. 谢恩’

My paternal grandmother is a *zimei*. My parents and most of my relatives have great respect for *zimei*, and I have witnessed a number of the *bu-zimei* performances since childhood. Therefore I believe I am well-informed about the *bu-zimei*. During

⁴ Performance 7 was recorded by my wife Zhang Hongmei 张红梅

my summer fieldwork, however, my role changed from purely that of a participant to that of participant-observer, that is, an insider-outsider. In the role of an anthropologist, I had wanted to make audio recordings of all the *bu-zimei* performances. While I was allowed to observe any ceremonies I wanted to, I was not allowed to record *bu-zimei* performed in Laershan and Muli.

3.3 Interviews

My participant observation was enhanced by conducting direct interviews. While participant observation allowed me to better understand the *zimei*'s behavior, interviewing helped me ask questions that elicited better insights into the motivations for the *zimei* mediumship.

I conducted interviews with ten female and two male *zimei*, six male *badui* spirit officials (shamans), and two *daoshi* Daoist monks. Like other Miaos living in these villages, the *zimei*, the *badui* spirit official, and the *daoshi* Daoist monk are farmers. On the recommendations of friends and relatives, I interviewed them in their houses, doing so in the evenings, since they worked in the fields during the day. I asked respondents, depending on their expertise, to provide insights into their families, recruiting methods, rituals, paraphernalia, clients, patron spirits, and behaviors as spirit mediums. In addition, I interviewed at least 20 people (adults of various ages and levels of knowledge, who were neither *zimei* nor *badui*) in various nearby villages about their views on the *zimei*. Most of these interviewees were with my friends and relatives, and some interviewees were introduced to me by my relatives. Therefore,

before interviewing, it was easy for me to invite them all to come together in one person's house, explain my research on the *zimei*, and obtain informed consent before asking questions. The interview data were obtained by asking the following eight questions:

1. Who are the *zimei*, the *badui*, and the *daoshi*?
2. What are rituals offered by the *zimei*, the *badui*, and the *daoshi*, respectively?
3. What are the methods of recruiting the *zimei*?
4. What are *bu-zimei* paraphernalia?
5. Who are the clients of the *zimei*?
6. What are the *zimei*'s patron spirits?
7. What are the stages of *bu-zimei*'s performance?
8. What are social norms that constitute social harmony in the Xiangxi Miao context?

The answers of these questions were vital in understanding *emic* and *etic* perspectives of the *zimei* mediumship, and the *bu-zimei*'s role in addressing the disruptions to social harmony.

3.4 Difficulties and Potential Limitations of Such Methods

As a native speaker of Xiangxi Miao, I encountered no language barrier while conducting my fieldwork. Nonetheless, finding answers to my questions was not always a straightforward process. First, I was not allowed to record or take photos during some activities. For example, during a practice of the *zhuga* 'healing illness'

ritual (Ch. 治病) performed in Laershan village, I was asked to put away my camera and audio recorder because the worshippers felt that my behaviors might endanger the *zimei* and spirits, and thus lead to a potential failure of the performance.

Some interviewees knew I was being educated in America, and they were afraid their audio recordings were to be taken to foreign countries so the local government might accuse them of being spies. Thus, some participants did not allow me to make audio recordings during interviews. In addition, some *zimei* intentionally did not reveal many aspects of their ritual practices. Some *zimei* refused to answer questions when they thought that the questions were unsuitable or sensitive. For example, when I asked if it was required of the *zimei* to be sexually abstinent, most of them declined to answer. Finally, since I only had two months to conduct the fieldwork, I did not have enough time to observe all types of the *bu-zimei*.

What I did to mitigate these difficulties was to respect every opinion my interviewees held. When they forbade me to make audio recordings or take photos, I put away my camera and audio recorder and took careful notes instead. In addition, I entrusted my wife, Zhang Hongmei, to record other types of the *bu-zimei* that I was not able to witness during the summer fieldwork period. She recorded the seventh ritual listed in Table 2 above.

3.5 Comparative Method

I also used the comparative method in my analysis: “the first task is to look for what used to be called ‘parallels,’ similar social features appearing in different

societies, in the present or in the past” (Radcliffe-Brown 1951: 15). I compared *zimei* with Chinese spirit mediums in Singapore and Malaysia. This comparison is a good demonstration to distinguish two roles belonging to the one category in different societies. In addition, I compared the *bu-zimei* with Chinese Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist practices. Such comparison is also a demonstration to distinguish different rituals in the same society. The information of the *zimei* and the *bu-zimei* is from my interviews and observations, whereas that of Chinese spirit mediums outside China and Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist practices is from literature and interviews.

Through the comparative method, I conclude that there are many similar features, such as recruiting methods, patron spirits, clients, and spiritual practices, between the *zimei* and Chinese spirit mediums in Singapore and Malaysia, if not also in mainland China. I therefore draw on theories of ritual and performance practices about these Chinese spirit mediums in Singapore and Malaysia. I also conclude that the *bu-zimei* has assimilated some Chinese Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

Chapter 4

Performing the *Zimei* Mediumship

4.1 Introduction

In Xiangxi Miao communities, spirits reveal their will and speak to humans through spiritual practices performed by *zimei*. This chapter discusses the identifications of these spirits and describes and analyzes how *zimei* establish and perform mediumship: their recruitment, rituals offered, paraphernalia, clients, patron spirits, and performance. It also describes the specific purposes of the rituals themselves.

The information in this chapter is based directly on the *zimei* I interviewed. I witnessed the *zimei*'s ritual, known as the *bu-zimei*, several times between June and August 2009 and took all photos in this chapter during this period.

4.2 Methods of Recruiting Mediums

Most of the *zimei* in Xiangxi Miao communities are women who range in age from their middle thirties upwards. Unlike candidates for Chinese spirit mediums in present-day Singapore, who have to undergo a course of preparation for a specified time period (Elliot 1955: 60), the *zimei*'s mediumship is not learned, taught, or inherited. The *zimei* Xiang Meizai 向妹在 and the fortuneteller Long Yunchang 龙云昌 have suggested to me that there are two ways that a Xiangxi Miao can become a *zimei*. The first is based on the belief that *zimei* mediumship does not derive from

human agency, but from the power of spirits. In theory, anyone can become a *zimei*. If a person is chosen by spirits to be a *zimei*, there is no escaping this duty. However, if a person has not been selected, she cannot become a *zimei*, however much she may desire it. If a person is chosen by spirits, the spirits will initially reveal themselves through a specific kind of dream. If that person refuses to accept the mediumship, spirits will cause trouble, haunting them so they become strangely ill and continuing to do this until they agree to become a *zimei*. The medium Xiang Meizai told me that she agreed to become a *zimei* when she was 30 years old in order to cure her unexplained illness. A spirit told her through a series of dreams that her illness would be cured if she agreed to be a *zimei*. After agreeing, her illness magically vanished two days later, and she became a medium, performing “as an intermediary between spirits and humans” (Firth 1959: 141).

The second mechanism which facilitates *zimei* mediumship is a person’s *bazi* 八字, an eight-character horoscope composed of two characters each from a person’s year, month, day, and hour of birth. An appropriate logonumeric combination indicates suitability for the demands of *zimei* mediumship. A person with such a *bazi* horoscope is supposed to have a natural ability to communicate with spirits. A person without this will not be qualified as a *zimei*. For example, the fortuneteller Long Yunchang told me that if a person was born at sunset on the sixth day of the sixth month in the Year of the Rat, that *bazi* horoscope is suitable for a *zimei* mediumship.

A person with this horoscope who would like to be a *zimei* may seek the tutelage of an experienced *zimei* from the local area as a symbolic master; they may then

independently perform *bu-zimei*, helping devotees cope with problems by consulting spirits.

An example of how this works may be found in the case of one of my interviewees. My paternal grandmother, Long Meiji 龙妹己, explained to me that she decided to become a *zimei* due in part to her special *bazi* horoscope. She was born at sunset, on the sixth day of the sixth month, in 1924, which was indeed the Year of the Rat. Once when she was young, she used a cloth to cover her face, held a burning incense stick, and seated herself on a chair beside a fireplace at home, pretending to perform as a *zimei*. Suddenly she stomped on the ground violently and couldn't control herself. After emerging from the trance, she was told by the fortuneteller Long Meiwan 龙妹万 that her *bazi* horoscope had accorded with the demands of a *zimei* mediumship and that her qualification had resulted in her possession. I take the trance to be "an altered state of consciousness (ASC)" (Tart 1969). As this trance incident became well-known in the community, my grandmother became a *zimei*, specializing in the *bu-zimei* and performing for the benefit of others.

Once a *zimei* has embarked on a career, there are several conditions and restrictions. One is that she or he should approach spirit possession in a "pure" state of mind, resulting in part from an abstinence from sexual intercourse for a significant period prior to performance of rituals. The *zimei* must also be an honest person. As an additional condition of the greatest importance, the *zimei* cannot refuse to perform rituals simply because they perceive themselves as being under compensated by clients. To refuse to perform on material grounds risks having their craft of

mediumship withdrawn by the spirits.

4.3 Rituals Offered by Mediums

The *zimei* give advice to clients and cure illnesses while under possession by a particular spirit during a *bu-zimei*. The reasons given for performing *bu-zimei* include poor harvests, lack of rain, infertility, high child mortality, or illness. The aims of the rituals are to protect the family, its children, its crops, and its animals (Schein 2000: 222). However, no matter what sort of service is provided, some sort of appointment should be made with the *zimei* to attend to the household. A *zimei* can practice for anyone, including both the immediate family and nonrelatives. If a ritual is performed to look for deceased ancestors, to improve the credibility of the *bu-zimei*, a *zimei* from an unrelated family is usually invited, especially one from another village.

The universe, the most encompassing of all space, is divided into three interconnected realms: the upper realm, the earth, and the spirit world (Her 2005: 5). The souls of the deceased climb up to reach *niuwang* ‘the upper realm,’ asking for permission to return to earth. The Xiangxi Miao consider the upper realm to be the place where the deceased asks for permission to descend into the living world. Based on my interviews and observations during 2009-2010, Miao spirit mediums appear to offer seven separate rituals.

4.3.1 *Sadai*: Asking for a Son from the Upper Realm

The first ritual the *zimei* provides is to request permission for such a descent. The

request is termed *sadai* ‘asking for a son to descend from the upper realm’ (Ch. 求子). During this ritual performance, a *zimei* goes into *dabia* the spirit world to visit tutelary spirits, including clients’ deceased ancestors, informing them of her or his purpose. Then the medium invites these spirits to go to *niuwang* the upper realm, where *Mingma* or ‘Fertility Goddess’ (Ch. 送子娘娘) is in charge of the children who descend to the living world. If *Mingma* agrees with their request, the deceased ancestors and the *zimei* are allowed to pass into a “town,” where they can select a child they like best, and take him back for their descendants in the living world.

4.3.2 *Nanwei*: The Expression of Gratitude for a Favor

The second ritual provided by the *zimei* is *nanwei* ‘expressing gratitude for a favor’ (Ch. 谢恩). If a son has been born in a client’s family after performing the *sadai* ritual described above, in return for the child’s descent, the worshipping family will entrust the *zimei* to carry many gifts and offerings to *niuwang* the upper realm, expressing gratitude for the favor of *Mingma*. The offerings include properly prepared *jinshan yinshan* 金山银山 ‘golden and silver mountain’ (gold and silver *joss* papers folded into the shape of mountains) and *jinyuanbao* 金元宝 ‘gold ingot’ (*joss* papers which are folded into the shape of gold ingots). In Xiangxi Miao communities, such folded gold and silver *joss* papers 金纸银纸 are valuable gifts for the spirits.

Figure 3. Prepared *jinshan yinshan* 金山银山 ‘golden and silver mountain’



Figure 4. Prepared *jinyuanbao* 金元宝 ‘gold ingot’



4.3.3 *Zhuga*: The Healing of Illness

The third ritual provided by the *zimei* is *zhuga* ‘healing illness’ (Ch. 治病). A *zimei* communicates with spirits in trance, consulting them on the reasons why members of a family are sick and giving them the advice to cure illnesses. For example, if a person falls down because his or her soul is caught by an evil spirit (Fadiman 1997: 20), the patient is told by the spirit taking possession of a *zimei*’s body to stand under the eaves in the next early morning before the sun rises, calling out to him- or herself three times, in order to recall his or her soul. If the ill person is a child, the mother can call out her child’s name on the child’s behalf. The soul-recalling should last at least three days, and usually on the fourth day the soul returns to the patient’s body.

Once in 1997, I become sick after walking home alone from another village in the evening. My mother called for a *zimei* to be summoned to perform the *bu-zimei*, consulting spirits on the reasons why I was sick. The diagnosis was that I had suffered some awful calamity, in which an evil spirit who had originally been killed by falling off a cliff had caught my soul, and my soul needed rescuing. My mother followed the *zimei*’s advice. The next three mornings, she stood under the eaves early, calling my name three times. On the fourth day, I felt better and began to eat again.

4.3.4 *Shuhou*: Looking for Lost Things

The fourth ritual performed by the *zimei* is *shuhou* ‘looking for things which are lost’ (Ch. 寻物). Nowadays, this ritual is seldom performed in Xiangxi Miao

communities, because it is much more convenient for people to buy new things from local markets, instead of summoning back the lost items. In the past, due to poverty and geographic isolation, Xiangxi Miao who lost valuable things often had to invite the *zimei* mediums to perform *bu-zimei*, consulting spirits on the location of the lost items. However, the *zimei* are not allowed to tell clients the exact place where the lost items are. The spirit mediums are only allowed to provide the hints of the place, because the clients do not want other participants to know where the lost things are. The *zimei* Long Huaying 龙花英 explained that her client, Wu Songqian 吴送前, complained because during the ritual, Long told Wu the exact place where he could find lost ancient copper coins. The *zimei* Long Huaying was told by her father to stop her career as a spirit medium because she broke a medium's rule.

4.3.5 Enbiou: Auspicious Geomancy of the Home

The fifth ritual provided by mediums is *enbiou* 'assessing a house's *fengshui*,' (Ch. 看风水). In Xiangxi Miao communities, the proper orientation of a house is determined by *fengshui* geomancy. When misfortunes such as illness, death, or personal financial loss frequently befall a family, Xiangxi Miao might consider that the problems may be due to the fact that the physical orientation of their house, the arrangement of objects within it, or other aspects of the dwelling are not auspicious. They may invite a *zimei* to perform the *bu-zimei*, consulting spirits on their houses' *fengshui*, and for advice on how to improve their family fortunes.

4.3.6 *Songli*: Sending Food to Deceased Ancestors

The sixth ritual performed by the *zimei* is *songli* ‘sending food to deceased ancestors’ (Ch. 送饭). This is one of the most common spiritual practices in Xiangxi Miao communities. This ritual is usually performed by a *zimei* a week after an elder has passed away. The *zimei* Long Meiji explained to me that recently deceased individuals are not used to the food in *dabia* the spirit world, and they often feel hungry. In this case, their descendants in the living world should invite the *zimei* to perform a *bu-zimei* to seek out the deceased and offer them meals. The *bu-zimei* may be performed at any time of day, especially if it is to send food to those who have been dead for a long time. During a *bu-zimei* performance, the living may consult the *zimei* on their deceased ancestors’ lives and about the spiritual power protecting these ancestors. The *zimei* usually cannot guarantee that all deceased ancestors can be found in the *dabia*, the spirit world of the deceased. Clients limit their requests to their own parents, grandparents, aunts, brothers and sisters, and uncles, who we may term *primary* ancestors. These are part of the direct lineage (Ch. 直系亲属), hierarchal patrilineal relatives.

Clients both identify their deceased ancestors and evaluate the credibility of the *zimei*’s performance based on three criteria. First, a *zimei* must utter the names of the deceased and state whether he or she is part of the direct family lineage or not. Second, a *zimei* must be able to determine the position of the deceased’s grave and tell the clients from which direction the deceased comes. Third, a *zimei* must be able to describe the deceased’s appearance and who his or her descendants in the living world

are (Ma 2006: 65). Only if clients deem the *zimei*'s performance believable they will recognize the deceased identified by the *zimei* as ancestors. Otherwise, the deceased are asked to leave, and the *zimei* should continue to look for the deceased ancestors until clients are satisfied that the ancestors summoned are actually their own.

“This form of ancestor worship has been assimilated from the Chinese Confucian focus on filial piety 孝” (Kuiper 2010: 70), i.e., the demonstration of respect for hierarchical family lineages (especially male lineages, though female ancestors are also venerated). The Xiangxi Miao, like the local Chinese, venerate ancestors as if they were still alive.

4.3.7 Chou Gunjia: Exorcism of Evil Spirits

The seventh type of ritual performed by the *zimei* is *chou gunjia* ‘exorcism’ (Ch. 驱恶鬼). “Illness is caused by a variety of different categories of evil spirit: for example, of those [spirits] who died by drowning, by the knife or gun; of hunger, or of falling from a cliff” (Tapp 2001: 152). In advance of an impending calamity, Xiangxi Miao *zimei* are summoned to perform an exorcism to kill evil spirits. Usually a whole rooster is sacrificed. Typically, while in a trance, a *zimei* tells the head of a household to take a red rooster and a peach branch, walk to a crossroads at the west end of the village, where the sounds of dogs and roosters cannot be heard. In the Daoist society within Chinese realm, red roosters and peach branches symbolize the exorcism of evil spirits, and a crossroads at the west end of the village is the only way that must be passed by the evil spirits. He should then kill the rooster and bury its bleeding head.

Thereafter, the head of the household should return home, and the evil spirit who caused illness will be exorcised by the *zimei*'s supernatural power.

4.3.8 Combining the Medium's Services

The *zimei* bridge all sorts of communications between humans and spirits. The seven types of rituals offered by the *zimei* sometimes result in different and distinct *bu-zimei*. Sometimes, however, these services are not completely distinct and may overlap in one or a series of *bu-zimei*.

One illustrative example is a series of rituals performed in my brother's home for a period of more than two years. These thematically related *bu-zimei* began with a *sadai* fertility ritual in 2008 (see 4.3.1 above), followed by a performance in 2010 that combined the *nanwei* expression of gratitude (in 4.3.2 above) with the ancestor-veneration aspects of the *songli* ritual (in 4.3.6 above). The second ritual in 2010, which was an expression of gratitude to *Mingma*, can only be interpreted with reference to the first ritual in 2008; both were performed by the *zimei* Zhang Yin 张音 in my brother's house in Shanjiang 山江 village.

Initially, in the summer of 2008, my mother invited a female *zimei* to perform the *sadai* ritual (4.3.1), asking *Mingma* for a son to "descend" to my brother's family. If *Mingma* would send a cute child for my brother, my mother promised that afterward, she would invite the same *zimei* to perform another ritual, the *nanwei* ritual (4.3.2), expressing gratitude to her. And so it was: the medium performed in 2008, requesting the Fertility Goddess's assistance; a child was born to my brother's wife at the end of

2009. Therefore, my mother again invited the *zimei* Zhang Yin to perform the following ritual of gratitude for *Mingma*'s assistance. (All speakers in the excerpt used only the Miao language, and did not code-switch into the local variety of Chinese.)

Zimei: A person named De 德 has come from *dabia* the spirit world. I wonder if he is your ancestor.

Client: We have many ancestors named De. Please ask him if he is from our direct lineage or not.

Zimei: He said that he is in the lineage. Do you know him?

Client: The host? Please ask him where he is from.

Zimei: He said that he is from the west of your house.

Client: Please ask him if he has descendants in the living world now.

Zimei: He told me that he has offspring.

Client: Sons or grandsons?

Zimei: Grandpa De said he only has grandsons in the living world now.

Client: Grandpa De is our ancestor. Please ask him to stay and enjoy the meals with other ancestors at the end of the ritual.⁵

The above interaction demonstrates that participants are careful to verify the identity of the deceased found by the *zimei* during a performance. They verify the deceased's identity as an ancestor and their location through the medium's use of exact names, appearances, lineages, descendants, and grave locations. These strict

⁵ Recorded with permission by my wife Zhang Hongmei on March 4, 2010.

criteria also show that the Xiangxi Miao have a great respect for ancestors. As stated above in 4.3.6, such ancestor worship indicates that the Confucian concept of filial piety has been wholly assimilated into Miao religious practice.

The above interaction also shows that mediums can perform multiple services in one ritual and can assist a family in maintaining proper spirit relations through a series of performances over time.

The Xiangxi Miao believe that the *zimei* are omnipotent persons because they are able to communicate with spirits. Thus, different events that can be consulted by participants during a performance improve the authenticity and credibility of the *zimei*'s mediumship.

4.4 Paraphernalia

A wide range of paraphernalia is essential, or at least desirable, for a *zimei*'s performance. During the performances, the Xiangxi Miao *zimei* wear plain clothing, in contrast to Chinese spirit mediums, who wear special sets of clothing (Elliot 1955: 49).

The tools of a *zimei* are important to the success of the *bu-zimei* performance, and they constitute the basic items found on a ritual altar (typically a table). Before a performance, clients must prepare the altar, which includes a table, *joss* paper “money,” incense sticks, an oil lamp, a piece of new cloth, a bowl of uncooked rice, and some money for the *zimei*'s performance. In addition, clients should prepare a chair and a woman's head covering. These are considered to be basic *bu-zimei*

paraphernalia. These paraphernalia, which are of special significance to the *zimei* during the *bu-zimei* performances, are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Significance of ritual paraphernalia

Items	Functions
table	Serves as the main body of the altar; items below are placed on it.
chair	Is the “winged horse” that the <i>zimei</i> rides in the otherworld.
<i>joss</i> paper	Symbolizes the money used in the otherworld.
incense sticks	Serve as torches, lighting the roads for the <i>zimei</i> in the otherworld.
head covering	The medium covers his or her face when falling into a trance.
uncooked rice	When picked up, determines the success or failure of consultation.
piece of cloth	Used to ward off evil spirits.
oil lamp	Represents the moon, lighting the roads for the <i>zimei</i> in the otherworld.

Table 3 shows that each item has its own essential function. Each item that is not prepared properly can directly affect the performance of the *bu-zimei*. Nowadays, some basic items of the *bu-zimei* altar have been replaced. For example, the oil lamp has now been replaced by candles. This change may be due to the obsolescence of the oil lamp after the 1980s, when electricity became commonplace throughout the Xiangxi area. Also, candles are inexpensive and convenient to use during the performance.

During a performance, the altar table is placed in the center of the main room of

the house, or beside a fireplace. Paper “money,” a piece of cloth, and a bowl of uncooked rice are placed on the table. Money, three burning incense sticks, and a burning oil lamp or candles are placed on or inserted into the bowl of rice grains. The chair is placed beside the table. The altar is able to provide spiritual forces for the *zimei* during the performance.

In the past, the *zimei* usually collected the cloth, rice grains, and a little money (about 5 RMB – then about US\$0.75) as compensation for her performance. Nowadays, however, rice and clothing are no longer sorely needed; instead, for one performance the *zimei* just collects a much larger sum of money as compensation (at least 150 RMB – about US\$20, or the equivalent of a week’s wages).

4.5 Clients

Not everyone in a Xiangxi Miao village believes in or practices the *bu-zimei*. Most of the believers are middle-aged, elderly, and predominantly female. According to my 2009-2010 interviews in Shanjiang, Quangongping, Machong, Paibi, Muli, Duli, and Laershan villages, local Miaos asserted that about 90 percent of Xiangxi Miao youths are not interested in *bu-zimei* performances. Youths reportedly do not believe in such spirits, and the *zimei*’s performances are considered deceptive activities, unworthy of attention. During the six *bu-zimei* events I witnessed in summer of 2009, those few young people who were present did not pay any attention to the performance: they talked throughout the performance about unrelated topics and saw the ritual as entertainment, as simply a place to gather.

Since the success of the *zimei*'s performance depends greatly upon the cooperation and faith of the clients, they should be sincere. Clients have "certain moral obligations, which have a bearing upon the success or failure of the performances" (Elliot 1955: 48). The clients should be honest to the *zimei*, and cannot intentionally dispute or make fun of the mediums during the performance. The clients are often reminded not to touch the *zimei* while she or he is in a trance.

Clients must also prevent dogs and cats from being present, as they violate the strictest and most commonly accepted prohibition. If a dog or a cat is present while the *zimei* is possessed by spirits, the *zimei* mediumship will be withdrawn by spirits. Without the craft of mediumship, she or he would be placed in great danger in the otherworld. Thus, believers do not allow dogs and cats to stay inside the house during a performance; they keep these animals at a reasonable distance from the *zimei* because these animals represent a potential distraction for both the performer and the clients (an etic perspective). The medium Wu Taiyang 吴太羊 explained to me that dogs and cats are taboo because the evil spirits like to possess these animals' bodies, causing harm both to the medium herself and the participants (an emic perspective).

Whether the audience sees the *bu-zimei* performance as an efficacious triumph over evil spirits or as simple entertainment, merely gathering during the performance improves interpersonal harmony, as I will argue in Chapter 5. "A ceremony may fulfill the latent function of reinforcing the group identity by providing a periodic occasion on which the scattered members of a group assemble to engage in a common activity" (Giddens 1984: 12). Villagers gather for the *bu-zimei*, which provide an occasion to

reinforce the Xiangxi Miao identity and pursue social harmony.

4.6 Patron Spirits

During a ritual performance, a wide variety of patron spirits appear; many of them are specific to each locale. In Xiangxi Miao performances, the *zimei* visits each of the patron spirits, one by one. Patron spirits include “household spirits” and “nature spirits,” and all these spirits are considered to be “gods.” The power of these patron spirits partially determines the success or failure of a *zimei*’s performance.

The patron spirits invited and visited by a *zimei* during a performance are numerous. Those that I will describe below are *Qijie* 七姐 ‘Seven Fairies’;⁶ *Pouzu* ‘Kitchen God’ (Ch. 灶神); *Pounong* ‘Rescuer God’ (Ch. 傩神);⁷ *Pounie* ‘Water Buffalo God’ (Ch. 水牛神); *Pourong* ‘Water Dragon God’ (Ch. 龙神); *Dudeng* ‘Earth God’ (Ch. 土地公); *Biuzan* ‘Village God’ (Ch. 寨神); *Gejiong* ‘Mountain God’ (Ch. 山神); and *Zhaging* ‘Spirit Soldiers’ (神兵).

The strong reach of Chinese Daoism and Shenism (Chinese folk religion) is particularly noticeable in the pantheon of patron spirits. Seven Fairies (*Qijie*) refer to the seven daughters of the mythical Daoist Jade Emperor 玉皇大帝, who is seen as the ruler of the whole universe. Earth God *Dudeng*, ruler of the earth, is a well-known Daoist patron spirit. Kitchen God *Pouzu*, ruler of family wealth, is a *shen* 神 ‘spirit’

⁶ Seven Fairies are seven daughters of the mythical Jade Emperor 玉皇大帝, the venerable god who rules the whole universe. Like an emperor of the human world, he is second only to the Three Pristine Ones (cf. Chapter 1, footnote 1), who are the most venerable gods of Daoism (Yin 2005: 1).

⁷ The Miao origin legend quoted in Chapter 1, the *Song of Creation*, tells that a person named *Nuo* 傩 saved the Miao in a big flood. The Miao established a shrine at home to memorize him and honor him as *Pounong* 傩神 ‘Rescuer God’ who ensures the health of a household’s children.

of Chinese folk religion. The Miaos have been immersed in Chinese society (and vice-versa) for centuries. Xiangxi Miao belief systems have inevitably assimilated much from Chinese Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Shenism.

Figure 5. The shrine of Kitchen God (*Pouzu*)



Figure 6. The shrine of Water Buffalo God (*Pounie*)



Figure 7. The shrine of Earth God (*Dudeng*)



Figure 8. The shrine of Mountain God (*Gejiong*)



Figure 9. The shrine of Village God (*Biuzhan*)



Figure 10. The shrine of Rescuer God (*Pounong*)



Household spirits are called this because their shrines are in the home. Nature spirits have either formal or informal shrines outdoors. Shrines of these nature spirits are built on waysides or mountaintops close to the village. Kitchen God, Rescuer God, Water Buffalo God, and Water Dragon God are considered household spirits, while Earth God, Village God, and Mountain God are considered to be nature spirits (野神). For each of these patron spirits (*Pouzu*, *Pounong*, *Pounie*, *Pourong*, *Biuzan*, *Gejiong*), the head of a household offers pork, paper “money,” and incense on the last day of each month. Of these patron spirits, only *Biuzan* Village God is a vegetarian. People cannot offer him pork or any other meat. *Qijie* Seven Fairies are invited during the performance to descend to the border between the otherworld and the living world to meet the *zimei*, accompanying her or him to visit other spirits in the otherworld. There are no shrines for the Seven Fairies, because the Xiangxi Miao do not make offerings or requests of the Seven Fairies, except the *zimei* before a ritual performance. The Seven Fairies are a *zimei*’s main companions throughout the performance.

These patron spirits have different duties and shrine locations (see table 4 below). As to the locations of each shrine, “[the] shrines have been established there because of the supposed efficacy of spirits, and they are the places where the family members come to make food offerings, to burn paper money and incense, and to make their obeisances” (Elliot 1955: 46).

In any event, during *bu-zimei* performances, the medium should consult all of the above seven popular spirits (the Gods) one by one – in the presence of the Seven Fairies – to address current and forestall future problems.

Table 4: Duties and patron spirits and the locations of their shrines

Popular Spirits	Duties	Shrine Location
<i>Pouzu</i> (Ch. 灶神) Kitchen God	Maintains a household's wealth	stove in the house
<i>Pounong</i> (Ch. 雉神) Rescuer God	Ensures the health of a household's children	left pillar of the house
<i>Pounie</i> (Ch. 水牛神) Water Buffalo God	Ensure crops, rainfalls, and harvest	central pillar of the house
<i>Pourong</i> (Ch. 龙神) Water Dragon God	Maintains a house's <i>fengshui</i>	center floor
<i>Biuzan</i> (Ch. 寨神) Village God	Keeps a village safe from danger	under old trees
<i>Gejiong</i> (Ch. 山神) Mountain God	Ensures a village's safety and continued power over evil spirits	mountain tops
<i>Dudeng</i> (Ch. 土地公) Earth God	Protects villagers' health and prevents death	roadsides
<i>Qijie</i> (Ch. 七姐) Seven Fairies	The main spirit companions during <i>bu-zimei</i> performances	(none)
<i>Zhaging</i> (Ch. 神兵) Spirit Soldiers	Defeat and kill the evil spirits during the <i>bu-zimei</i> performances	(none)

4.7 The *Bu-zimei* Performance

The Xiangxi Miao spirit mediums are invited to perform *bu-zimei* at clients' homes in the evenings. The *zimei* Wu Yuhua 吴于华 and Long Meiji told me that these rituals are performed in the evenings so as not to attract attention. In the eyes of local authorities, such rituals were considered superstitious, backward, and unhealthy, and were sporadically persecuted (Elliot 1955: 23).

By reviewing the pattern of *zimei* performances, we can understand how a medium performs these *bu-zimei*. The performances seem perfunctory, in that each *zimei* follows a somewhat predictable fixed pattern of behavior, which is respected by participant clients. Although the aims of the *bu-zimei* vary (see rituals above), we can identify four stages of the performance process.

First, though, I observe that for economic reasons, some parts of the process are now skipped over by the experienced *zimei* to save time. For example, an experienced medium does not need to invite patron spirits through burning *joss* papers, because the popular spirits are familiar with the medium, and she or he can orally inform the popular spirits before a performance. Nonetheless, a young *zimei* must perform a complete ritual and strictly follow the canonical order of a given performance. Below, I describe the complete and canonical order of the *bu-zimei* performance.

The first stage of the *bu-zimei* performance is called *qingshen* 请神 'inviting patron spirits.' Before a performance, the *zimei* should light *joss* paper "money" under the shrines of household spirits including the Seven Fairies listed in Table 4 above. The medium informs the patron spirits that she will represent the people of *yangjian*

‘the living world’ to visit them tonight. Since *Qijie* Seven Fairies do not have shrines, the *zimei* burns paper “money” in the yard for them.

The second stage of the performance involves inducing the *zimei*’s trance; there are several possible methods. After inviting the patron spirits, the *zimei* lights three incense sticks and the oil lamp, inserting them in a bowl of uncooked rice on the altar table. Meanwhile, the *zimei* should put some *joss* paper “money” under the altar and also under the four legs of the chair she sits on during the performance. If a medium comes from another village, she must burn some paper “money” around the chair to acquire spiritual protection, and so as not to be harassed by the local mediums in the audience, who do not know her. By the time a *zimei* has completed all these preparations, she or he sits down in the chair, ready for the trance.

Figure 11. The altar table and the *zimei* in trance



At the beginning, a *zimei* uses the head covering to cover her or his face, and then stomps on the ground violently, sometimes while chanting. In theory, the *zimei* must stomp violently on the ground about one and a half minutes on average before falling into a trance. The onset of a trance is signified by yawns, erratic movements, talking to *Qijie* Seven Fairies, and muttering strange sounds. When a *zimei* begins to show signs of spirit possession, she or he steps on the ground gently. Clients hold lighted incense sticks, readying questions for the spirits who now possess the *zimei*.

Unlike Chinese spirit mediums, whose success of performance depends greatly upon the competence of their assistants (Elliot 1955), the Miao *zimei* does not have assistants, and a performance's success completely relies on her or his own competence. Yet, as noted above, clients do have the moral obligation to encourage the success of rituals by preventing dogs and cats from approaching the mediums and not touching the mediums themselves. Either would potentially place the *zimei* in great danger during a journey into the spiritual world.

The third stage of a performance is concerned with personal consultation. The consultation proceeds via a question and answer format. In this stage, the *zimei* is still in a trance. She or he first meets *Qijie* Seven Fairies, who have been waiting patiently at the border between the living and the spirit worlds. Accompanied by these Seven Fairies, the *zimei* visits other popular spirits one by one, until the problem posed by the clients has been resolved.

During a personal consultation, unlike the *badui* spirit officials (shamans) who throw his divination cattle horns upon the ground to indicate a families' (dis)harmony

in the future, a *zimei* asks clients to pick up and count the number of rice grains from the ritual altar to determine a family's future situation. When *Pouzu* Kitchen God sees family conflict, the head of a family is asked to pick up an odd number of grains of rice. If he or she scoops up an even number of grains, family conflicts are said to be unavoidable. The clients need to keep on consulting *Pouzu* Kitchen God for solutions, until the household head picks up right number of rice grains.

In the fourth stage of the *bu-zimei* performance, the *zimei* and her or his patron spirits accomplish the task entrusted by clients. The medium gives a signal that spirits are going to leave. The medium thanks patron spirits one by one on the way back to the living world. After violently stomping on the ground for about a minute, the *zimei* emerges from the trance by removing the head covering from her or his face. Clients are not allowed to discuss and evaluate the ritual performances with the medium or the mediumship might be withdrawn by spirits.

An Example of a *Bu-zimei* for Sending Food to Ancestors

As an example, let us look at a *songli* 'sending food to deceased ancestors' performance on July 15, 2009, enacted by the *zimei* Wu Xiangyin 吴香音 in Shanjiang 山江 village.

The *zimei* Wu first lighted five piles of *joss* paper "money" under the shrines of household spirits, including one pile in the yard for the Seven Fairies, and then she sat down in the chair before the altar table that had been prepared by her clients, ready for the performance. She used a head covering to cover her face and then stomped on the ground violently. One minute later, she talked to her main companions, Seven Fairies,

indicating that she had fallen into a trance.

After falling into a trance, the medium Wu Xiangyin first visited the household spirits 家神 one by one. She explained to me afterward that household spirits were *Pouzu* Kitchen God, *Pounong* Rescuer God, *Pounie* Water Buffalo God, and *Pourong* Water Dragon God. Participants consulted these four household spirits on problems (relating to health, wealth, and family conflicts), and the household spirits solved these problems, with the help of the medium.

After she visited and consulted the household spirits, *zimei* Wu then went to visit the nature spirits 野神: *Dudeng* Earth God; *Gejiong* Mountain God; and *Biuzan* Village God.

After visiting the nature spirits, *zimei* Wu went on her journey into *dabia* the spirit world and passed by places where some spirits beat drums and gongs, fought lions and dragons, drank blood, kicked shuttlecocks, and gambled; she crossed roads, rivers, bazaars, mountains, and gardens. When *zimei* Wu passed by these places, *Qijie* Seven Fairies reminded her not to be influenced by these activities or entrancing landscapes. She was instead to return posthaste. Evil spirits blocked her way, impolitely asking her for money and food. The *zimei* called for her spiritual soldiers to defeat these evil spirits. At the same time, the clients burned some paper “money” outside the house to persuade the evil spirits to leave and not to disturb the *zimei*’s journey into *dabia* the spirit world.

After passing by these places, *zimei* Wu finally arrived at *dabia* the spirit world, and began to look for the clients’ deceased ancestors. During this particular

performance, *zimei* Wu required fully five hours to locate the clients' deceased ancestors; these ancestors were difficult to find. Once the main (lineage) ancestors were found, participant clients asked them about their own situations in *dabia* the spirit world, as well as about the problems of their descendants. Finally, the participant clients provided their ancestors with meals.

Communications between participant clients and spirits in possession of *zimei* Wu during the performance was accomplished by whipping a burning incense stick (see Image 10 below). When *zimei* Wu visited *Pouzu* Kitchen God, for example, Kitchen God possessed the medium's body and got ready to contact humans in the living world. A client should ceaselessly whip a burning incense stick around the oil lamp on the altar table while consulting *Pouzu* Kitchen God on the family's health and wealth in the current and future years.

Figure 12. Personal consultation during the performance



After making food offerings to deceased ancestors, *zimei* Wu told her clients it was time for her to come back and she thanked her patron spirits one by one on the way back to the earth. She finally stopped stomping on the ground and removed the head covering from her face, claiming to end her ritual.

During the *bu-zimei* performances, the *zimei* are under possession of spirits and work themselves as mediums between humans and spirits. The *zimei* address misfortunes such as illnesses and conflicts and tell their clients how to stem these misfortunes. Conflicts and illnesses are disruptions to social harmony that the Xiangxi Miao are seeking to achieve. This practice reveals that the *bu-zimei* is also performed for social purposes. In the next chapter, I explore how this ritual serves to restore social harmony when it has been disrupted.

Chapter 5

The *Bu-zimei* Ritual's Role in Achieving Social Harmony

5.1 Introduction

What is the social value of the ritual known as *bu-zimei*? Superficially, the ritual serves as a personal consultation. I hypothesize that it also serves to maintain and restore social harmony when it has been disrupted. In this chapter, I explore how the *bu-zimei* improves and restores social harmony by imposing social norms. The information in this chapter is based directly on my interviews and observations during the summers of 2009 and 2010.

During the *bu-zimei*, the *zimei* consults spirits on human problems of health, wealth, infertility, crops, harvest, rains, and family conflicts. “There is an interactive relation between spiritual practices and society, and this interaction is able to achieve social peace and harmony in the living world and the metaphysical world” (He 2007: 39). This chapter explores this interaction and its dynamic relationship with social experience.

5.2 Social Harmony in Xiangxi Miao Communities

In the local context, *roushimian* ‘social harmony’ (Ch. 社会和谐) entails balance among humans, between humans and spirits, and between humans and nature. In the Miao villages of Shanjiang 山江 and Laershan 腊尔山, village heads Wu Songjie 吴送杰 and Long Bingting 龙丙厅 explained normative social harmony to me. These are

taishi duzhan (lit., ‘people having health’), *rouyangqing* (lit., ‘obtaining good harvests’), *linie jiukou*, *likong daiguo* (lit., ‘giving thanks and observing filial piety’), *rougadai* (lit., ‘having auspicious housing *fengshui*’), and *rongyangsang* (lit., ‘having thriving domestic animals’). The above expressions summarize what constitutes the three kinds of social harmony for the Xiangxi Miao: that among humans, between humans and spirits, and between humans and nature. However, villager Wu Songmin 吴淞民 in Machong 麻冲 village explained these expressions to me in local Chinese. That these expressions are also Chinese shows that the local Han Chinese are subject to such norms. The strong influence of Confucianism on Xiangxi Miao society is noticeable in these norms: giving thanks and observing filial piety indicate Confucian respect for parents and ancestors.

Social harmony in the local context is different from English social harmony. “Social harmony is about maintaining a level of equilibrium in economic terms in civil society. The natural tensions that exist within any plural human collective are ameliorated through cross cultural understanding, respecting, iteratively renegotiating and maintaining a level of balance in the power relations, resources, functioning and capacities between potentially conflicts groups, whether these be based on broadly economic, political, social, racial and religious or cultural distinctions” (Galla 2009: 3). English social harmony focuses on balance among humans. By contrast, social harmony of the Xiangxi Miao entails balance between humans and spirits (e.g. respect for deceased ancestors) and between humans and nature (e.g. having auspicious housing geomancy) in addition to balance among humans.

5.3 Applying the Theory of Structuration

In addition to its normative nature, the *bu-zimei* is also a social activity, to which it is useful to apply Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration. I take the fundamental social structure to be social harmony. "Structure...refers to systems of generative rules and resources" (Giddens 1976: 127). In the Xiangxi Miao context, the rules and resources are the societal norms mentioned in 5.2: maintaining health and wealth, observing filial piety, obtaining good harvests, and having auspicious housing *fengshui* and healthy domestic animals. Together, these social practices constitute or reconstitute social harmony as the fundamental social structure of the Xiangxi Miao. Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration emphasizes the relation between human agency and structure. "The social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of this constitution: each act of constitution at the same time is an act of reconstitution. The structure that produces actions conducted by agents is, during the performances of those actions, reproduced" (Giddens 1976: 121).

The theory of structuration is useful in analyzing the relations among the spirit medium, the ritual, and social harmony in the Miao society because the theory of structuration emphasizes the active flow of social life. "Social life is seen as a series of ongoing activities and practices that people carry on, which at the same time reproduce larger institutions" (Giddens and Pierson 1998: 76). In Xiangxi Miao communities, the medium is a divining person who exerts power; the rituals constitute a continuous flow of community interventions conducted by the mediums; and social

harmony organized by rules and resources is recursively produced or reproduced by such rituals. According to the theory of structuration, therefore, the *zimei* serves as an agent, the *bu-zimei* as human agency or action, and social harmony is the fundamental social structure of the Xiangxi Miao.

5.4 Spiritual Harmony, Interpersonal Harmony

An important collateral effect of villagers gathering for the *bu-zimei* is the maintenance of social relationships. In Xiangxi Miao communities, the *zimei* is often summoned to perform the *bu-zimei* to solve specific problems, “when something goes against people’s will, for example, [which] in a given year includes poor harvest, lack of rain, infertility, high child mortality or illness, or the progressive thinning of trees” (Schein 2000: 222). Neighbors and relatives are invited to attend the performance. Some other villagers might also attend the *bu-zimei*, even if they were not specifically invited. The villagers’ participation reflects the integration of spiritual activities into Miao society (He 2007: 39), because the villagers consider spiritual practices to be a part of their daily routine. The Xiangxi Miao focus on realizing harmony between humans and spirits through spiritual practices.

The village head Wu Songjie told me that social harmony depends primarily on good friendship among relatives, friends, neighbors, and villagers. A host family is socially obligated to inform relatives, neighbors, and other villagers of the date of a *bu-zimei*, normally a week in advance, whether or not these other people would be interested in the ritual. In the summer of 2009, my maternal grandmother Tang

Meihong 唐妹红 invited the *zimei* Wu Xiangyin 吴香音 to perform the *bu-zimei* of sending food to deceased ancestors. The day before the performance, she informed my mother, aunts, other relatives, neighbors, and some other villagers that her family would perform the *bu-zimei* the next day, on July 15.

Some people attend the *bu-zimei* merely to meet and greet relatives, friends, and neighbors; not all believe in the rituals. Furthermore, attendees often chat during a performance. “The *bu-zimei* is not a very somber ritual, and the audience may talk and laugh during the performance” (Ma 2005: 55). During a performance, attendees sit around the *zimei*, as he or she consults with the spirits. Meanwhile, listeners greet each other and talk about their crops, incomes, harvest, health, weather, and the old days. Through this chat, villagers reach agreement in opinions, manners, and news. The *bu-zimei* thus is both an opportunity for relaxation, and a way to achieve social harmony.

The *bu-zimei* unites people, and yet at the same time allows them to express their differences. Therefore, the ritual not only achieves harmony between humans and spirits; it also is an opportunity for people to achieve harmony among themselves, which fosters close friendships.

5.5 Restoring *Fengshui* 风水

In the eyes of the Xiangxi Miao, the harmonious spatial orientation and construction of houses, known as *fengshui* is important. “Village orientations were determined by geomancy. Their houses were constructed of wood, stone, or mud brick,

depending on location” (Schein 2000: 52). It is the *fengshui* of the home that determines how powerful the spirits are in protecting and blessing family members. If the home’s geomancy is powerful, then the spirits will be powerful. If the home’s geomancy is awry in any way, however, the spirits may well be ineffective so that family members and domestic animals are often sick.

During a performance, the *zimei* uses the Chinese terms *di* 地 ‘location’ and *li* 力 ‘power’ to describe the harmonious orientation and construction of a household spirit’s “house.” The *zimei* uses the number of locations (*ji kuai di* 几块地) and the number of powers (*ji kuai li* 几块力) to measure household spirits’ housing geomancy. The numbers selected often range from one to nine. The higher the number, the more power to protect humans the spirit possesses. For example, *jiu kuai di* 九块地 ‘nine locations’ and *jiu kuai li* 九块力 ‘nine powers’ are considered excellent housing *fengshui*. In contrast, if a spirit merely possesses a single location (*yi kuai di* 一块地 ‘one location’) and a single power (*yi kuai li* 一块力 ‘one power’), then the house has terrible *fengshui*.

The Xiangxi Miao believe that the supernatural movement replicates actual movement. During a performance, when the *zimei* practitioner “arrives” at a household spirit’s “house,” participating audience members consult the *zimei* on the spirit’s housing geomancy. Once the spirit has a good geomancy, family members and domestic animals can keep healthy and family harmony is more likely to be achieved, they believe. If a spirit’s housing geomancy is unsatisfactory, participants may consult the *zimei* for advice on how to restore the housing geomancy.

I witnessed a *bu-zimei* asking for a son from the upper realm, performed by the *zimei* Wu Mei 吴梅 in Quangongping village on June 2, 2009. During this performance, the *zimei* visited Kitchen God (*Pouzu*) and clients consulted the medium on this Kitchen God's housing geomancy. In the following, the *zimei* asks for a son from the upper realm:

Zimei: We are going to visit *Pouzu* Kitchen God, to consult him on the problems of the mortals.

Client: Please ask *Pouzu* Kitchen God about his housing geomancy. Is his housing geomancy good or bad?

Zimei: The housing geomancy of your Kitchen God is *jiu kuai di* [nine locations] and *jiu kuai li* [nine powers]. His housing geomancy is excellent. *Pouzu* Kitchen God, if your housing geomancy is really nine locations and nine powers, please allow them to pick up the rice grains twice: an odd number and an even number.

Picking up rice grains during the *bu-zimei* is a way to determine a household's future (dis)harmony. Odd or even numbers of rice grains, which a spirit asks participants to pick up during the ritual, ensure that the determination of *fengshui* is auspicious [*jixiang* 吉祥]. If the rice grains selected by a client are the same number the spirit requested, household harmony will be achieved.

In addition to *Pouzu* Kitchen God, clients consult *Pounong* 'Rescuer God' (Ch. 傩神) on his own housing geomancy. If *Pounong* Rescuer God's housing geomancy is unsatisfactory, a family is more likely to experience high child mortality, infertility,

and frequent illness, which are disruptions to the achievement of social harmony. Thus the *zimei* should tell mortals how to restore the disrupted housing geomancy, so that *Pounong* Rescuer God will possess more power to bless mortals. The following sample is from a *bu-zimei* sending deceased ancestors food, performed by the *zimei* Wu Xiangyin in Shanjiang village on July 15, 2009.

Zimei: Let's visit *Pounong* Rescuer God and measure the width and length of his housing geomancy. *Pounong* Rescuer God in your house is not as powerful as *Pouzu* Kitchen God. He has seven locations and nine powers.

Client: Is *Pounong* Rescuer God not powerful with his seven locations and nine powers?

Zimei: The location of your *Pounong* Rescuer God is not so good because he only has seven locations.

Client: What shall we do to restore *Pounong* Rescuer God's housing geomancy?

Zimei: At *lidong* 立冬 [the start of winter], you may buy him some pork and rice wine, and invite a *badui* spirit official to visit *Pounong* Rescuer God. In addition, you should place some cinnabar (Ch. 辰砂) under *Pounong* Rescuer God's shrine. Then his housing geomancy can rise to nine locations and nine powers.

The *zimei* Wu Xiangyin explained that cinnabar can cleanse spirit houses and exorcise evil spirits. Families sometimes place cinnabar besides the household gates if they feel disturbed by evil spirits. For example, children often cry in the evening. The Xiangxi Miao usually get cinnabar from mountains or buy it from local markets.

During this ritual, *zimei* Wu also visits *Pourong* Water Dragon God (Ch. 龙神), who is in charge of the future prospects for the youths of a family. As with the other spirits, if Water Dragon God possesses good housing geomancy, then youths will have a good future. When children have good prospects, the family is at peace; a peaceful family brings out social harmony. The following is an excerpt from a Water Dragon God *bu-zimei*.

Zimei: We shall look at *Pourong* Water Dragon God's home and measure the width and length of his housing geomancy.

Client: Please check whether the housing geomancy of Water Dragon God is good or bad.

Zimei: Water Dragon God of your house has nine locations and nine powers. His housing geomancy is excellent.

Client: Water Dragon God is powerful. Please bless your descendants in the living world, and make us live in a harmonious life.

The above three excerpts show that the Xiangxi Miao pay close attention to the geomancy of spirits' abodes and consult the *zimei* for this purpose. If the spirits' housing geomancy is unsatisfactory, the *zimei* and the spirits will inform mortals how to restore it. These ritual actions show one method for achieving harmony. Housing and village *fengshui* is related to social harmony that Xiangxi Miaos are seeking to achieve. Frequent illnesses, infertility, and high child mortality resulting from bad housing *fengshui* produce social tension and anxiety because people in a village treat each other as brothers and sisters. During the performance of the *bu-zimei*, the *zimei*

consult spirits on how to keep family members and domestic animals healthy. These actions are related to Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration, in that ritual social actions conducted by the mediums as agents constitute or reconstitute social structures and, thus, social harmony.

5.6 The *Bu-zimei* Helps Domestic Animals Thrive

Financial losses are one of the elements that disrupt the achievement of social harmony. The Xiangxi Miao people are farmers, and their incomes come mainly from livestock: domestic animals such as pigs, chickens, and goats. Abundant and healthy domestic animals guarantee harmony. During the *bu-zimei*, when the spirits see some unexpected financial losses to a family's livestock, mortals may consult the spirits to achieve the harmony. I witnessed such a performance by the *zimei* Wu Xiangqin 吴香琴 in Laershan 腊尔山 village on July 25, 2009. Through a medium, *Pouzu* Kitchen God explained to one client how to stem financial losses, speaking in Miao, but using the Chinese terms noted below:

Pouzu Kitchen God: You may consult a fortuneteller on a *churi* 出日 [auspicious day for an outing]. On that day, buy one pound (*jin* 斤) of paper "money" and divide it into three bundles. Then sit beside a fireplace, throwing the three bundles back over your shoulder, one bundle at a time. Someone else should pick up the paper "money," take it outside and walk 220 steps westwards. Wherever they end up, they should then burn the paper "money." From then on, your family's fortunes will become better and better.

The clients' consultation of spirits about a family's financial losses shows that stemming financial losses is also part of the achievement of social harmony.

5.7 The *Bu-zimei* Resolves Family Conflicts

Xiangxi Miao people believe in the Chinese saying “if a family lives in harmony, all affairs will prosper (家和万事兴).” Interpersonal harmony in a family results in wealth and health. The *zimei* Long Quansheng 龙全生 told me that family conflicts cause disharmony, including poor harvests, unexpected personal financial losses, and illness. During the *bu-zimei*, immortals often remind mortals to maintain and reestablish harmonious relationships among family members. The *bu-zimei* can be used in anticipation of possible conflicts, proactively seeking to avoid them. If conflicts have taken place, the *bu-zimei* is performed to achieve harmony. A dialogue between *Pouzu* Kitchen God and my maternal grandmother Tang Meihong during the *bu-zimei* performed by the *zimei* Wu Xiangying in Shanjiang village on July 15, 2009, demonstrates this phenomenon:

Grandma Tang: We will not mind whatever you tell us. We invited the *zimei* to visit you today. Please tell us whether you have seen any problems in my family.

Pouzu: Your family's fortunes were not trending auspiciously last year and this year, because of some conflicts between you and your daughter-in-law. Have you forgotten the conflicts?

Grandma Tang: They were so small that we did not take them personally.

Pouzu: Some illnesses happened to your family members due to your conflicts. To

avoid another illness, you and your daughter-in-law must promise to stop having conflicts.

Grandma Tang: Dear *Pouzu* Kitchen God, we promise not to complain about each other again. And we are ameliorating our relationship. Please bless us and take illnesses away...

Apart from dealing with conflicts between mothers- and daughters-in-law, spousal relations are another common focus of the *bu-zimei*. A couple's marital harmony influences a family's stability, harmony, and the growth of its children. Therefore, elders often consult spirits on the relationship between their sons and daughters-in-law. For example, my mother Long Jinkui 龙金葵 consulted *Mingma* Fertility Goddess on my own relationship with my wife. The following dialogue took place between my mother and the *zimei* Zhang Yin 张音 in my brother's home.

Mother: Will Hexian [the author] and Hongmei [his wife] dislike each other in the future?

Mingma: No, they will not. They will grow old together. Please pick up an odd number of rice grains to ensure they both live to a ripe old age.

Mother: Yes, I picked up an odd number of rice grains.

Mingma: Their affection will be stronger and stronger, because they descended into the living world simultaneously.

(Recorded on March 4, 2010, by Zhang Hongmei 张红梅)

Family conflicts cause disharmony. During the *bu-zimei*, the spirits often remind the mortals to stop family conflicts to avoid illnesses.

5.8 The *Bu-zimei* Enacts Reciprocity and Social Hierarchies

As is common in Confucian societies within the Chinese realm, the Xiangxi Miao worship ancestors, and show piety toward higher-ranked male social superiors. In Xiangxi Miao communities, such ancestors include spirits, deceased ancestors, and elders. It is important for the Xiangxi Miao to show ancestors this filial piety and show them gratitude. Gratitude for favors and kindness (Ch. 恩) and filial piety (Ch. 孝) are the Confucian norms that govern Miao social harmony. The Xiangxi Miao also use the Chinese concepts above, *en* 恩 and *xiao* 孝, to govern social harmony. It is impossible for a family or a community to achieve harmony where these aspects are neglected.

During the *bu-zimei*, the *zimei* enacts social reciprocity; that is, the social premise that favors must be repaid with other favors. The deceased, the spirits, and the elders should be shown respect to avoid illnesses or other misfortunes. If a member of one's family is sick, it is believed that some members of this family did not give thanks for favors or observe filial piety, which caused the spirits' dissatisfaction and resulted in illness. The immortals can then show the mortals how to achieve harmony, as in the following dialogues among *Pouzu* Kitchen God, the *zimei*, and my maternal grandmother Tang Meihong in a performance in Shanjiang 山江 village on July 15, 2009:

Zimei: *Pouzu* Kitchen God complained that your family did not know how to give thanks.

Grandma Tang: We gave thanks for what you did for us. Why did you say that we

did not know to give thanks?

Pouzu: No, you did not...

Zimei: Dear *Pouzu* Kitchen God, please do not let the illness come down to humans.

Meanwhile, please sweep away illnesses from the mortals.

Grandma Tang: Yes, please help us.

Zimei: *Pouzu* Kitchen God mainly complained that you two housewives (mother- and daughter-in-law) did not take good care of him. You often insulted him while cooking.

Grandma Tang: We will be very careful later. Would you please get rid of the illnesses from my family?

Zimei: Since you two have agreed to take good care of *Pouzu* Kitchen God, he will drive all illnesses out of your house. However, you two should select a day to kneel down in front of *Pouzu* Kitchen God, burning some incense and paper “money” in apology. Remember not to cook meat or pork oil on that day. Do you agree with him?

Grandma Tang: Yes, we will do as you told us...

Spirits embody elders, who should be respected. Spirits therefore permit social relationships to exist after the death of the actors. Disharmony such as illness and conflicts will arise when the spirits have been insulted by humans.

As norms of social harmony, *en* and *xiao* (giving thanks for favors and showing filial piety) must be shown to ancestors. During the *bu-zimei*, if such reciprocal gestures are absent, or the flow of reciprocal gestures is disrupted, then the *zimei* and

spirits guide participants in restoring this reciprocal flow. Restoring the balance of favors and social hierarchies indicates that the *bu-zimei* is a ritual activity enhancing the Xiangxi Miao's possibilities of achieving social harmony.

5.9 The *Bu-zimei* Indicates Self-Sacrifice

In Xiangxi Miao communities, the older generations care for the younger generations and may even sacrifice their lives for them if necessary. "The main features of harmony are dialogue, tolerance, co-existence and development" (An 2009: 4). Care and self-sacrifice, to some degree, are manifestations of family members' mutual tolerance. On the other hand, family members' mutual tolerance makes care and self-sacrifice feasible. I argue in this section that the realization of harmony also requires considerable mutual aid and self-sacrifice.

This mutual care and self-sacrifice can be seen in a *bu-zimei* performed in my maternal grandmother's house on July 15, 2009. During the performance, my maternal grandmother Tang Meihong told the *zimei* – while they were possessed by *Pouzu* the Kitchen God – that she (my grandmother) could carry the family's illnesses herself if need be. My grandmother wished that the spirit would therefore remove all illnesses from other family members. She knew she was too old to labor in the fields and had no other projects she wanted to pursue. The young people, however, needed to labor in the field and make money to support the whole family. My maternal grandmother's offer of self-sacrifice to the younger generation shows that Miao elders care deeply for the young, and they dare to shoulder heavy responsibilities. This

self-sacrifice is one of factors constituting social harmony in Xiangxi Miao communities.

Zimei: *Pouzu* Kitchen God has seen that some illnesses will take place in your family.

Grandma Tang: Please figure out who might become ill.

Zimei: *Pouzu* Kitchen God said the illnesses would happen to both the old and young.

Grandma Tang: Please *Pouzu* Kitchen God and look at the illnesses carefully. Do not let them happen to the young, because they should stay healthy in order to work in the fields, making money to support their families. I am too old to work, and have nothing to pursue. If illnesses are unavoidable, let them befall me.

The Xiangxi Miao advocate care and self-sacrifice, which are also norms of social harmony. Elders dare to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the younger generation. This action shows that the *bu-zimei* performance mirrors social harmony in Xiangxi Miao communities. It also shows that the *bu-zimei* helps clarify familial and social relationships that will be implied by ongoing relationships. Care and sacrifice also imply reciprocity. The grandmother is, through her discourse as facilitated by the *zimei*, articulating the structure of an ideal familial social network in which the elder generation can express its love while also expecting gratitude and respect.

5.10 The *Bu-zimei* Advocates Selflessness

Selflessness is another strategy for achieving Xiangxi Miao social harmony, and Xiangxi Miao selflessness is usually seen during the performance of a *bu-zimei*.

Although the main aim of the ritual is to consult spirits about a household's health, wealth, crops, harvest, and conflicts, the host family rarely forgets to also consult spirits on dangers affecting the whole village. Villagers are supposed to treat each other like brothers and sisters. If something bad occurs and creates disharmony, a family should consult spirits to solve these problems. On July 6, 2009, I witnessed a performance by the *zimei* Long Ximei in my brother's house. Clients consulted *Pounie* Water Buffalo God (Ch. 水牛神) on the possibility of life-giving rains for the farmers' crops via the medium:

Pounie: There is drought in July of this year, and there will be shortage of water at that time.

Client: You should provide an average amount of rain. Farmers work very hard.

Please do not let a drought come to us.

Zimei: Dear *Pounie* Water Buffalo God, we farmers plant crops and want to have a good harvest. Please *Pounie* Water Buffalo God provide an average amount of rain.

In addition to consulting Water Buffalo God, clients consulted *Dudeng* 'Earth God' (Ch. 土地公) and *Gejiong* 'Mountain God' (Ch. 山神) to ensure the safety of the whole village and avoid dangers. If misfortunes causing social disharmony are seen by spirits, clients will ask the spirits how to restore social harmony. In the following example, clients consulted *Dudeng* Earth God on safety and dangers in Shanjiang Village.

Zimei: We have arrived at *Dudeng* Earth God's house. *Dudeng* Earth God is in charge

of the safety of the whole village. Let's look at *Dudeng* Earth God's house. His house is "sparking" with light and no coffins [symbolizing death] are found inside.

Client: It is very nice not to have coffins in *Dudeng*'s house. *Dudeng* Earth God should protect your descendants, and not let coffins stay inside the house.

Zimei: From now on, if *Dudeng* Earth God can defend your villagers and take away all illnesses, please give them an odd number of rice picking up [odd numbers of rice grains ensure that the villagers keep healthy].

Client: Yes, I picked up the odd number of the rice. *Dudeng* Earth God must protect us well.

Zimei: Okay, *Dudeng* Earth God has promised that no death will come to the village this year.

Client: All people in this village are your descendants. Some of them are living outside the village. Would you agree to protect them too?

Zimei: Please do not worry. *Dudeng* has agreed to protect them too.

Although the *bu-zimei* is performed for personal consultation, as can be seen above, often the whole village benefits. Thus the *bu-zimei* focuses on not only the harmony of a single household, but also on the collective harmony of a village.

5.11 The *Bu-zimei* Gets Rid of the Illnesses

In the eyes of Xiangxi Miao people, illness directly disrupts a family's harmony, and only a return to health restores this harmony. If a member of one's household falls

ill, Xiangxi Miao invite a *zimei* to consult the spirits on causes and treatments. During a performance, when a *zimei* is visiting a certain spirit, clients inquire about the health of family members, because some family members will be experiencing illness and the achievement of harmony with respect to health is actually not so easy. A performance of the *bu-zimei* I witnessed on August 6, 2009, in Muli 木里 village involved consulting *Gejiong* Mountain God on treatments, after clients were told that there would be the illnesses in the family.

Client: It is very nice to meet you. You should protect us and take good care of us. We have sent you a great deal of money and rice.

Gejiong: Please tell the children to be careful this year, because I have seen some coffins come down.

Client: You should take good care of us and take the coffins away.

Gejiong: It is hard, because both the aged and the young have been selected to die.

Client: Generation after generation of your descendants rely on your protection.

Gejiong: It is hard for me to protect the aged, but you may make three *bi bushai* ‘sweet wormwood knots’ (Ch. 青蒿结) and seven bamboo torches 竹火把 for the children. You must place these things at the west end of the village on August 15 and the coffins will be swept away.

In Xiangxi Miao communities, wormwood and bamboo torches are also used to sweep away misfortunes caused by evil spirits. On an auspicious day (August 15 of that particular year), wormwood and bamboo torches could have been placed at the west end of the village from which the evil spirits usually come, and the misfortunes

could have been swept away. Additionally, such torches must also be placed near the head of a household after performing the *bu-zimei*, so that the *zimei*'s spiritual power can temporarily reside there.

A stable temperament also constitutes "health." In another performance in my brother's house, my mother Long Jinkui consulted *Mingma* Fertility Goddess about my unexplained "illnesses":

Mingma: Hexian [the author] is good and clever. However, he is often angry with himself.

Mother: Why is he often angry with himself sometimes?

Mingma: He is angry about some things that he is unable to do. You may help him plant some moon and sun trees [fir trees] so he will not be angry with himself and let him have a good feeling.

There are some fir trees at the entrance of each village in Xiangxi Miao communities. Fir trees ensure a village's safety and continued power over evil spirits. When a medium diagnoses someone as ill, family members can plant a fir tree at the entrance of the village. The sick person's safety then can be ensured. The planting of fir trees at the entrance to a village is a public act of sacrifice and piety. A stand of fir trees becomes a clear sign of a community in which there is honor, respect, and obedience to spirits. This would be an example of a personal issue being expressed as something that affects the community as a whole, making it clear that achievement of harmony for an individual also contributes to the harmony of the whole village.

The Xiangxi Miao pay attention to the health of the family members because

health affects social harmony. The *bu-zimei* can restore the disrupted health of family members.

5.12 The *Bu-zimei* Defeats Evil Spirits in the Otherworld

The Xiangxi Miao people believe the otherworld is an authentic reflection of the living world; the otherworld has good and bad persons, rivers, mountains, trees, and even legal systems. In the course of a journey into the otherworld, the *zimei* might meet with evil spirits standing by the road, asking for food and money. Evil spirits seriously disturb a *zimei*'s performance, so they should be defeated or killed. "Evil spirits in the otherworld represent bad people and local bullies in the living world. They destroy social order and harmony, and humans have the privilege to punish them" (Ma 2005: 44). Strictly speaking, to achieve social harmony evil spirits should be killed. However, a *zimei* and clients often try peaceful methods before resorting to force because the forceful destruction of evil spirits is something that is risky and harmful. If negotiation does not work, the *zimei* then calls together her or his own spirit soldiers to defeat or kill the evil spirits. In a performance of the *bu-zimei* expressing gratitude to *Mingma* Fertility Goddess performed in my brother's home on March 4, 2010, the *zimei* dealt with the evil spirits by first attempting negotiation, followed by brute force:

Zimei: We have arrived at a place where people are bleeding. I have seen much blood,
so I am very scared.

Client: Hurry up, hurry up, and leave this place at top speed.

Zimei: Please the mortals, send the evil spirits money because we are scared.

(Participants burned paper “money” for the evil spirits outside the house.) In addition, please send us some bullets.

Client: Please do not worry about them. We have sent them money and gifts. If they still do not disperse, kill them with your horses and guns.

As illustrated above, the *zimei* and clients often attempt to persuade demons to leave by burning some paper “money” for them, which is a strategy in which anyone could participate. If the demons still do not agree to leave, force vested in a specific individual is the next resort.

Below is another performance from Shanjiang village, recorded on July 6, 2009.

Evil spirits: “*Ai hu!*” [horrible sounds] Give us money! Give us money....

Client: Who gives you money? There is no way.

Zimei: There are too many devils with bleeding faces. They look horrible.

Evils spirits: Money, money... [The evil spirits keep asking for money]

Client: Just give you some money this time. You may take your money outside the house, and please do not disturb the *zimei* medium’s performance ever again.

Evil spirits: No, we need more money.

Zimei: There are too many evil spirits here. Some died by drowning, from a gun or a knife wound. They look ugly.

Client: Since they do not want to leave, *zimei*, please summon your master and soldiers to come to catch and kill them all.

Zimei: Most Exalted Lord Lao *Taishang Laojun* 太上老君 comes to kill the evil

spirits and protect me in order not to be disturbed by them...

The *zimei* resorts to the protection of a Daoist deity: the Most Exalted Lord Lao *Taishang Laojun* is associated with the Daoist religion, specifically with the Chinese philosopher *Laozi* 老子. This practice reinforces the syncretism with Daoism. Both good and evil spirits are ruled by the Daoist deities. Daoism is so powerful that it will kill the evil spirits. Daoism also plays a central role in the funeral *Song of Creation*, in which *Taishang Laojun* is the master of the *zimei* (see Chapter 1).

The ritual of the defeat of the evil spirits can advance social harmony; the pursuit of peace and harmony is crucial to the Xiangxi Miao.

This chapter has explored the *bu-zimei*'s role in achieving harmony within Xiangxi Miao society. The *zimei* performs the *bu-zimei* for communication with spirits that can play a specific role in maintaining and restoring social harmony when it has been disrupted. This relation between spirits and society through the *zimei* as mediator is related to Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration. In the Xiangxi Miao context, the *zimei* is a divine who serves as an agent, performing the *bu-zimei* as human action. Social harmony is fundamental to social structure. The ongoing human actions (the rituals) conducted by agents (the mediums) recursively constitute or reconstitute fundamental social structures (social harmony). The theory of structuration, which focuses on the relations between social practices and structure, is thus applied to the relationships among the medium, the ritual, and social harmony of the Xiangxi Miao.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

6.1 The Reciprocity between Humans and Spirits

In the previous chapters, I described the performances of *zimei*, including their recruitment, rituals, paraphernalia, clients, and patron spirits. In addition, I discussed how the ritual known as the *bu-zimei* serves to achieve social harmony.

In Xiangxi Miao communities, humans and spirits are subject to principles of reciprocity. The *bu-zimei* describes, promotes, and enacts this reciprocity by providing instruction on how it is to be conducted, by repaying the spirits' favors with human favors and vice-versa. Worshippers of the spirits regularly burn *joss* paper "money" and incense as offerings; in return, spirits are expected to reveal their supernatural knowledge. However, the most direct and powerful method by which to acquire a favor in return for offerings is to invite a medium, which is also a method of inviting the spirits. *Zimei* mediate a reciprocal relationship between the human and spirit worlds.

In the clients' eyes, the *zimei* are described as omnipotent specialists because they can satisfy all kinds of requests for spiritual intervention through their relationship with the spirits. Clients are able to find solutions to their problems using the *zimei*.

6.2 Interpretation of Spirit Possession

From an emic perspective, the *zimei* journey into the otherworld and are

possessed by spirits during the performances. They perform themselves as mediators between humans and spirits, doing so by providing a “channel” through which the spirits can speak with living people. They present themselves as working *at the will* of the spirits.

If we observe the *bu-zimei* performance from the audience’s perspective, the *zimei*’s spirit possession suggests a lack of control over herself or himself. This is indicated by changes in appearance, form of speech, and behavior. The *zimei* close their eyes and use a head covering to cover their faces. They sometimes do not represent their own speech. They sometimes mutter strange sounds and speak, laugh, and cry like a child or an elder. In addition, the *zimei* continuously wave their arms and stomp on the ground either violently or softly during the performances.

6.3 A Syncretic Matrix of the *Bu-zimei*

The *bu-zimei* is both animist and profoundly syncretic. The Miao believe in animism. However, with Chinese migrations to Miao regions and Miao migrations within China as well, Miao encountered Chinese major religions: Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Shenism. Some traits of these religious systems blended together syncretically in the Miao spiritual practices. Specifically, the strong influence of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism is demonstrated in the *bu-zimei*. For example, the participants send food to their deceased ancestors and show them Confucian filial piety, address *Mingma* Fertility Goddess who is a Buddhist, communicate with *Tudigong* Earth God who represents Daoist religion.

6.4 The Micro and Macro Functions of the *Bu-zimei*

A micro scale refers to “one of individual’s internal sense of self and identity” (Giddens 1984), such as a family. A macro scale refers to “one of the society and social organizations” (ibid.), such as Miao society.

From a micro point of view, the *bu-zimei* focuses on individuals’ problems. Personal demands are met by consulting spirits. Chapter 4 implies that individual personal consultation is the directed aim of performing the *bu-zimei* because the ritual is simply performed to solve individual problems. A *zimei* medium can be consulted on the causes and treatments of illness or to mediate between a deceased ancestor and relatives.

If we view *bu-zimei* performances macroscopically, they serve to maintain and restore social harmony. “The Miao is a nationality that pursues social harmony and peace” (Fan 2004: 80). For the Xiangxi Miao, social harmony entails large and healthy families, good harvests, expressing thanks to spirits, as well as the maintenance of hierarchical household and village social relations (filial piety). The very existence of these norms implies the existence of disharmony, and harmony can be achieved through the *bu-zimei* performances.

6.5 The Decline of the *Bu-zimei*

In the last twenty years, the *bu-zimei* has been in decline in Xiangxi Miao communities due to internal and external factors.

Internally, secrecy about *zimei* mediumship has resulted in a lack of young

practitioners. To keep their superior social status and mystery of their craft, the *zimei* are unwilling to reveal their craft to their audiences, which has resulted in fewer young people being interested in spirit mediumship. Moreover, in present-day Xiangxi Miao communities, many of the young people consider the mediumship a deceptive activity because they do not believe that humans can communicate with spirits.

In addition, as noted earlier, *zimei* are strictly selected on the basis of *bazi* horoscopes. The mediumship is not learned, taught, or trained. A person must self-select. Even when someone's *bazi* horoscope would qualify him or her for mediumship, he or she does not necessarily have an interest in becoming a medium. Since new mediums cannot be recruited, existing mediums cannot pass on their knowledge of craft to apprentices. Thus, within Xiangxi Miao ritual practice, the *zimei* mediumship may contain "the seed of its own decline" (Elliot 1955: 168). The restrictions that prohibit recruiting and training apprentices have resulted in the decline of the *bu-zimei*.

With regard to the external factors, in present-day Miao communities there is no direct governmental interference in religious activities, unlike during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Nonetheless, *bu-zimei* are still seen by local authorities as backward and unhealthy. In contrast, the Han Chinese practice of ancestor worship, also practiced by the Miao, "received a certain amount of official understanding and tolerance" (Tapp 2001: 147).

Another factor in the *zimei*'s decline is the improvement of village health. Since

the 1980s, rural healthcare improvements have included the creation of convenient and inexpensive hospitals and clinics where the patients can be cured. In contrast, performing the *bu-zimei* to consult spirits on the illnesses needs to do many essential preparations, such as making appointments with the mediums, informing relatives and villagers, buying enough *joss* paper and incenses, and preparing a red rooster and a peach branch. Concomitantly, fewer and fewer Xiangxi Miao patients first seek healing from *zimei*. In present-day Xiangxi Miao communities, the exorcism ritual is performed only if the patients cannot be cured in clinics or hospitals.

Although there is no current governmental interference in the *bu-zimei*, their practitioners do not obtain any governmental support. With the rapid development of domestic tourism, local governments have issued a series of policies both protecting and promoting Miao culture. Some Miao folk activities and customs have been reconstituted to satisfy tourist demands. Since 2000, some Miao folk practices such as *qunong* (honoring the memory of Rescuer God *Nuoshen* 傩神), *nongnie* (honoring the memory of the Miao legendary ancestor *Chiyu* 蚩尤), and wedding songs have been promoted by local Chinese government. However, the *zimei* and the *bu-zimei* are not supported. The lack of local Chinese governmental support and approval probably facilitates the decline of the *bu-zimei*.

The *bu-zimei* serves to address disruptions to social harmony, while at the same time reinforcing the need for *zimei* mediumship as a fundamental element of Miao culture and society. This practice restores social harmony when it has been disrupted. The Miao are identified as animists, and animism informs a great deal of spirit

mediumship. With the Miao migrations within China and vice versa, Xiangxi Miao spirit mediumship is performed as a syncretic matrix of animism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. Syncretic spirit mediumship helps to advance social cohesion and acculturation. Thus, the gradual disappearance of this practice is a problematic trend because it may affect Miao identity, social cohesion, and acculturation.

Glossary

Miao Terms	Source Language	Chinese Gloss	English Gloss
<i>badui</i>	Miao	老司	Miao spirit official, shaman
<i>bazi</i> 八字	Chinese	八字	eight-character horoscope
<i>bi bushai</i>	Miao	青蒿结	sweet wormwood knots (to sweep away misfortunes)
<i>Biuzan</i>	Miao	寨神	Village God
<i>bu-zimei</i>	Miao	跳仙	<i>zimei</i> spirit medium ritual
<i>chou gunjia</i>	Miao	驱恶鬼	exorcism of evil spirits
<i>dabia</i>	Miao	冢间	spirit world (cf. <i>duidu</i> , <i>niuwang</i>)
<i>daoshi</i> 道士	Chinese	道士	funeral ritual practitioner (Daoist)
<i>Dudeng</i>	Miao	土地公	Earth God
<i>duidu</i>	Miao	凡间	earth, living world (cf. <i>dabia</i> , <i>niuwang</i>)
<i>enbiou</i>	Miao	看风水	assessing geomancy
<i>fengshui</i> 风水	Chinese	风水	geomancy
<i>Gunsuo</i>	Miao	雷公	Thunder God
<i>gun</i>	Miao	鬼	spirit, ghost
<i>Gejiong</i>	Miao	山神	Mountain God
<i>jinshan yinshan</i> 金山银山	Chinese	金山银山	golden and silver mountain
<i>jinyuanbao</i> 金元宝	Chinese	金元宝	gold ingot
<i>linie jiukou</i>	Miao	感恩	giving thanks
<i>likong daiguo</i>	Miao	孝顺	observing filial piety
<i>Mingma</i>	Miao	送子娘娘	Fertility Goddess (=Ch. <i>Guanyin</i> 观音)
<i>nanwei</i>	Miao	谢恩	expressing gratitude
<i>niuwang</i>	Miao	天堂	heavenly upper realm (cf. <i>dabia</i> , <i>duidu</i>)
<i>nongnie</i>	Miao	椎牛	water buffalo sacrifice (lit., ‘eating the cow’)
<i>pou</i>	Miao	祖父	god
<i>Pounong</i>	Miao	傩神	Rescuer God
<i>Pounie</i>	Miao	水牛神	Water Buffalo God
<i>Pourong</i>	Miao	龙神	Water Dragon God
<i>Pouzu</i>	Miao	灶神	Kitchen God
<i>Qijie</i> 七姐	Chinese	七姐	Seven Fairies (Daoist)
<i>qingshen</i> 请神	Chinese	请神	inviting patron spirits
<i>qunong</i>	Miao	吃猪	honoring the memory of <i>Pounong</i>

<i>rougadai</i>	Miao	好风水	auspicious housing geomancy
<i>roushimian</i>	Miao	社会和谐	social harmony
<i>rouyangqing</i>	Miao	好收成	obtaining good harvests
<i>sadai</i>	Miao	求子	asking for a son
<i>shuhou</i>	Miao	寻物	looking for lost things
<i>songli</i>	Miao	送饭	sending food to ancestors
<i>taishi duzhan</i>	Miao	人人健康	people having health
<i>Tudigong</i> 土地公	Chinese	土地公	Earth God
<i>yangjian</i> 阳间	Chinese	阳间	living world (cf. <i>yingjian</i>)
<i>yingjian</i> 阴间	Chinese	阴间	nether world (cf. <i>yangjian</i>)
<i>zhaging</i>	Miao	神兵	spiritual soldiers
<i>zhuga</i>	Miao	治病	healing illnesses
<i>zimei</i>	Miao	仙娘	spirit medium

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